THE ROLE OF RECORDS STORAGE FORMATS AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN ENHANCING SERVICE DELIVERY IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate sound records management in Nairobi City County (N.C.C) in enhancing service delivery with the intention of making recommendations. The study adopted the descriptive research design. The target population of the study included all the 22 records clerks in the various departments of Nairobi City County as well as the records manager. A census approach was used to select all the 22 records clerks staff while purposive sampling technique was used to select the records manager. The results of the study established that generally, the respondents perceived that their knowledge was good based on their professional educational training. However, they had had no in-house training on records management. It was revealed that both manual and electronic formats were used in the storage of records at N.C.C and the manual format was the most dominant. In addition, the study also found that in as much as there were some records that were being captured, stored and retrieved through use of ICTs, the N.C.C top management had no goodwill, commitment and support the use of ICTs in records management function. It was also established although N.C.C has a records management policy, it was rarely complied with and there was no mechanism in place to monitor the staffs' compliance with it. The policy has also not been reviewed since its formulation. The records management personnel were competent based on their knowledge and skills on records management. The study also concluded that the top management of N.C.C did not have the good will to facilitate full adoption of ICTs in the records management functions. The study recommended that the records manager should establish a mechanism through which the records management policy could be complied with by the personnel. The study also recommended that the top management of N.C.C should have the good will, commitment and support to ensure that digitization and automation of records management activities.

Key Terms: Professional Knowledge and Skills, Storage Formats, Records Management

INTRODUCTION

The concept of service delivery is a topic alone for majority of governments as well as scholars. Scholars are of the agreement that public service delivery is crucial to guaranteeing the national wellbeing and stimulation of economic advancement. This is on the grounds that on day to day schedule governments perform regulated and unregulated activities aimed at providing its nationals with services besides ensuring that the services are provided based on the rule of law (Kaunda, 2005; Wamukoya, 1995; Naidain, 2006; Shah, 2005). Good records management practices are the foundation of better and improved service delivery (Ngoepe, 2008). This is on the account of the fact that governmental departments can just take appropriate moves and settle on correct decisions in the event that they have adequate information. Good records management practices enhance service delivery efficiency and effectiveness in numerous ways. This could be achieved through policy and procedure documentation that informs service delivery for example, the sort of services provided, who are in charge of doing the work; and the costs involved.

The International Organization for Standardization, (ISO) (2001) defines a record as "information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in transaction of businesses". The Nairobi City County plays a critical role in offering service delivery through various records management activities that occur on a daily basis. Details from rates and payment of business permits are some of the day to day records that are kept by various departments in the county government.

According to the South African National Archives and Records Service(n.d.) "records management is the management of information resources in a manner that makes information easily accessible, securely protected and stored, and correctly disposed of when necessary". Service delivery in records management within the newly established county governments revolves around policies, programs and standards. This also includes formats used in storage of records, the use of information communication technologies (I.C.T) in management of records as well as the professional knowledge and skills of staff.

Records are a critical source of information and knowledge. They are imperative in helping the government to make timely, relevant and informed decisions and as a result contributing to sustainable socio-economic and political development (Kemoni, 2007). A record is not simply characterized by its physical form, the information it contains or its age but by the essential characteristic of providing evidence of some particular activities.

Kennedy and Schauder (1998) noted that a records management policy is "the official charter for performing all records management functions". They further point out that a records management policy has to be clear and should outline records management functions in relation to the organization's records keeping requirements. As a standard for best practices in records management ISO 15489-1 (2001) specifies that institutions should "establish document, maintain and promulgate policies, procedures to guarantee that its business need for evidence and accountability and information about activities is met". Kennedy and Schauder (1998) defined a records management manual as a "guide for the functions of a records management system within an organization". This is because the manual provides information on how records management systems operate. A records management manual serves to standardize procedures, establishes responsibility, assists in personnel training, provides for updates on policies and procedures (Kennedy and Schauder, 1998).

The ISO 15489 Standards for Records Management point out that a policy sets vital governance plans for all records that are either produced or received in accordance with established best practices and principles. The records management policy is applicable to all information regardless of the formats. A records policy incorporates all stages within the records lifecycle such as the creation/receipt, maintenance, use, appraisal, retention and disposition. According to Kemoni (2007) without a records management policy for instance, it is difficult to establish efficient records management systems that supports decision-making. Kemoni (2007) further indicates that the absence of a records management policy has the ability to obstruct the role of public service providers. Thus the lack of a records management procedures manual would have implications such as records management personnel not having the necessary guidelines for managing records during the continuum of activities that would make the management of records throughout their lifecycle easier.

Shepherd and Yeo (2003) are of the view that an effective records management program should encompass the management of all records regardless of their formats. According to (Kalusopa, 2011), knowledge on available records type and formats in labour organizations in Botswana were largely incomplete. Thus this study reiterates his point of view that organization's and county governments in Kenya need to conduct records surveys not only to establish the formats of records created but also to ensure their timely access, use, appraisals and disposal. Technology formats of storing information keep on changing from time to time this becomes a challenge in the way institution's store their records in electronic formats.

However, despite the above findings from different researcher's service delivery in county governments in Kenya has been slowed down due to improper usage of records formats and the fast trend onto which technology is changing, hence this study sought to establish clear formats and technologies of records that could be adopted in managing records at the county thus improving service delivery.

According to Tale and Alefaio (2005), many countries in the developing world have come to realize the importance of ICT to economic and social development particularly where tradition systems have tended to hamper public service delivery. They are of the view that the adoption of ICTs presents numerous opportunities in records management. A good illustration is the records retrieval and compact storage through electronic and digital storage devices that offer an alternative to the bulky paper records that require a considerable amount of space for storage. (Kalusopa, 2011) puts it that it is the user's acceptance and use of ICTs that defines its success or failure and that the integration of ICTs in records management functionalities is critical for effective e records readiness in organizations. Electronic records are dependent on ICTs. These records are created and managed through the use of computer technologies.There has to be mediation in order to access electronic records(International Records Management Trust, 2009).A study by Kootshabe(2011) found out that records security in many government ministries had challenges such as unauthorized access in to records storage areas as messengers and cleaners often had access to records storage areas this hampered service delivery. The use and implementation of access controls and biometric registration would offer a solution to issues of security of records in government institutions.

The newly created county governments need to embrace relevant technologies in management of records hence this will lead to improved service delivery. This study seeks to evaluate and recommend on the best approach that can be used in the implementation of I.C.T system's in file and

document management this will enhance security of files and documents received for processing and dispatched from the records unit of the county government.

Records personnel skills are vital in ensuring service delivery in any particular institution. Manyabula (2009) noted that most of the records management personnel in the Tanzanian public sector were under trained and this eventually had an implication on service delivery. He pointed out that most records management personnel had no training in records management and for those who did, the training and knowledge they received was very little to enable them to effectively execute records management responsibilities. The poor skills and training were evident despite their potential in enhancing service delivery. Lack of professionalism arising from inadequate training in records management would essentially have a negative influence on public service delivery. According to International Records Management Trust (2000), the success of any integrated records management program in service delivery is dependent on the professional training of the staff responsible for the creation, use and maintenance of records.

The Nairobi City County is a predecessor to the defunct City Council of Nairobi. It is a creation of the new Constitution of Kenya that was promulgated in 2010. The auspices under which Nairobi City County operates are The Devolved Governments Act and the Cities and Urban Areas Act. The Nairobi City County is mandated to provide wide ranging services to residents under its area of operation. These services relate to roads, water, environment, urban planning, urban renewal, housing and building services, education, youth and social services, public service management, commerce, tourism and co-operative services, health services among a host of other services. These are services that were being provided by the then defunct City Council as well as those that

were decentralized from the national government. These services are provided by the following departments; Roads, Public works and Transport, Environment, Energy and Water, Urban Planning and Lands, Urban Renewal, Housing and Building Services, Education, Youth and Social Services, Public Service Management, Commerce, Tourism and Co-operative sector, Health Services, Information Communication Technology and e-Government, Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Natural Resources, County Security, Compliance, Fire and Disaster Management.

Objectives of the Study
The specific objectives of this study were to:

- Determine the level of professional knowledge and skills of staff working in Nairobi City County.
- Establish the formats used in the storage of various types of records in Nairobi City County.

RELATED LITERATURE
Theoretical Framework
Systems Theory
This theory was coined by a biologist Bertalanffy (1968).He opined that "systems are open to and interact with their environments and they acquire qualitatively new properties through emergence resulting in continual evolution". He proposed that in a system, there are subsystems which are dependent and yet they are interdependent. When one system is affected, a ripple effect goes throughout the system. Every system is goal directed and has its outputs. The theory has three properties of input, process and output.

Record management and service delivery can be viewed through the lens of systems theory. In Nairobi City County, inputs are received from the environment and can be viewed as infrastructure, personnel and the records. The personnel consist of managers, middle level personnel and the subordinates. These three categories of personnel have different functions but all are aimed at achieving

one goal. If the subordinate staffs fail to do their functions, the whole system would fail. So, each person is expected to report on duty in time, do what he/she is supposed to do at the right time and at the right place.

The process can be viewed as the various functions which take place within the work place. Personnel have specific duties to perform upon which they are answerable if not performed. These functions include supervision, monitoring, receiving information, creating files, retrieving files, issuing permits, and maintaining files throughout their life cycle. For all these functions to take place effectively there is communication among the personnel to enable efficient management among the managers and the subordinates. There is also communication among the personnel and the citizens who are being served. During communication, there is feedback from both parties which facilitates efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. Communication can be verbal or written.

Output refers to the services that are delivered. If the records were poorly managed, kept and retrieved then the service delivery would be poor. On the other hand, if the records were properly managed, kept and easily retrieved without wasting time, service delivery would be effective and efficient. These services are rendered to the citizens who are from the environment. Nairobi City County can thus be viewed as an organization which receives information from the environment, processes it and gives services as the output.

Records Lifecycle Model

The information lifecycle encompasses phases that range from record creation to record disposition through either designation of the record as permanent or controlled destruction process. The legal and regulatory requirements as well as the business function determine the length of time that a

record is considered current, its retention, storage and retention and destruction if applicable. The lifecycle of records according to Yusof and Chell(2000) begins first during their organization, maintenance and active usage by the creators. This lifecycle continues during the record's additional storage period of dormant or infrequent use and ends when they are considered as archives and transferred to an institutional archive, or when they are destroyed after being declared as having no value.

All records, despite their purpose and form, pass through phases that are well defined (Newton, 2003). The lifecycle of a record simply refers to the logical steps movement of records from their creation, through use, storage, retention in active files, and transfer to inactive files and finally disposal (Gill, 1993). Effective and efficient public service delivery will be determined through whether records pass through all the phases of the lifecycle. In the event that the records do not pass through the entire lifecycle, then there would be challenges in public service. This model is applicable to this study as it would seek to establish whether the records at the Nairobi City County pass through all the phases of the lifecycle which facilitate better service delivery.

Service Quality Gap Model

The service quality gap model is one concept that elicited much debate and interest in the field of scientific research given the difficulties of defining as well as measuring it (Wisniewski, 2001). Varying definitions of what service quality means has been discussed by different authors. According to Wisniewski(1996), "service quality is the extent to which a service meets customers' needs or expectations". The service gap model was developed by Parasuraman in 1985 in which he identified four gaps that include knowledge gap, design gap, performance gap and the communication gap. The fifth gap, which focused on customers' expectations and perceived service, was identified by (Zeithaml,

Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990). These gaps can be viewed as those that relate to the records management practices. The difference between what the records management practices provide and the customer expectations is the service being provided.

Despite the systems theory, records lifecycle model and the service quality gap model being relevant to this study, the researcher will adopt the systems theory. This theory is concrete in explaining the relationship between the records management and its influence on service delivery within Nairobi City County. The theory identifies the input factors that whose processing delivers the expectations of customers in terms of service.

Professional Knowledge and Skills of Personnel in Records Management

According to Noluvuyo (2010), records management personnel should be qualified with the requisite skills and knowledge to facilitate them in properly carrying out their duties. The existence of well trained and eligible personnel in records management guarantees efficiency in the work done. Ugwunze (2001) and Uwaifo (2004)emphasized that "records management has little prospect of success unless the services of trained personnel were employed". Formal and informal trainings are imperative since they bestow new skills and hence giving confidence to staff in the course of service delivery (Wamukoya, 2000; Ugwunze, 2001).

According to a study by Kyobe, Molai, and Salie, (2009) at the Universisty of KwaZulu-Natal in Cape Town, South Africa, the findings revealed that of the surveyed respondents, less than ten percent had qualifications in records management. In addition, the study also found that some of the staff had undergone training in a few records management concepts from the time they started doing records work. The findings established that the institution lacked qualified staff in records management and no

consistent training for the personnel was being provided. Despite these shortcomings, the surveyed institution boasted of wide records management experience at the expense of trained and qualified personnel. This technically means that with untrained personnel, offering efficient, effectively and timely services to the university community will be faced with challenges given the changing dynamics in records management field. It is controversial how the institutions boasts of wide records management experience with no qualified personnel trained in records. It thus becomes necessary that a study be carried if there can be effective records management with no formally trained personnel.

Formats Used In the Storage of Records

An effective records management program should encompass the management of all records regardless of their formats (Shepherd and Yeo, 2003). Findings of previous research studies have established that majority of government institutions are predominantly keeping paper based records as compared to electronic records (Kaluspoa and Ngulube, 2012). According to (Kalusopa and Ngulube, 2012), it is imperative that ISO-compliant records management programs document the various formats and types of records generated and maintained by institutions. The format of records is of concern especially in the digital environment in which the accessibility is limited by the lifespan of a specific format. The study by Kalusopa and Ngulube (2012) in labour organizations in Botswana indicated loose papers in folders as well as lever arch files as the types of paper formats in use. In addition, the researchers also found emails; Microsoft Office documents and databases were the frequently utilized digital formats of records in majority of the labour organizations surveyed in Botswana.

Moloi (2006) investigated electronic records management in Botswana. The study revealed that there was preeminence of paper based records and unorganized electronic records majorly in basic word

processing. A related study by Keakopa (2006) in three South African countries revealed similar findings. Keakopa (2006) noted that there were records in both electronic and paper based formats. However, it was also noted that the mass of the records were in paper-based format. Keakopa (2006) indicated that "although paper (was) a common medium of transmission and storage of information, electronic records (was) slowly becoming more common". There is always efficiency brought in cases where electronic formats are utilized. It is logical to note from the opinion of Keakopa (2006) that indeed there is more efficiency in service delivery in cases where records in electronic formats are utilized.
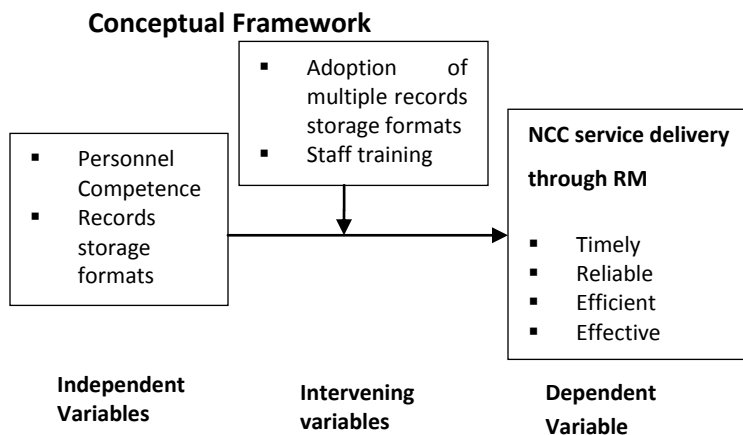
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the use of a descriptive research design. This research design entails dealing with conditions, practices, structures or processes that apparently depict the patterns and trends that exist or sentiments held by people (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2009). This study adopted the use of descriptive research design because the data collection instruments generated data that could be analyzed using descriptive explanations. Records management is a phenomenon that requires description particularly with regard to its influence on service delivery. The researcher intended to explore, through a description of the views and attitudes of

Nairobi City County staff, what exists pertaining to records management and in particular service delivery. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were adopted in the study. Quantitative data was collected through the use of structured questions in the questionnaire whereas qualitative data were obtained from open ended questions and the interview schedule.

FINDINGS

Professional Knowledge and Skills of the Respondents

The first objective of the study was to find out the professional knowledge and skills of the respondents. The researcher sought to establish from the respondents if they had had any in-house training on records management. This was necessary since county government institutions being new units, it would be ideal for the staff to undergo an in-house training on the management of records at N.C.C. It was revealed from all the respondents that they had had no in-house training on the management of records at N.C.C. The interview conducted with the records manager also confirmed that there was no in-house training on records management that has been conducted at N.C.C.

This finding corresponds to that of Kemoni (2009) who in an empirical review of studies in ESARBICA region pointed to lack of skills among the records management personnel. In-house training is one way of capacity building to ensure that the personnel have skills in the management of records. Ideally, the finding implies that the objective of records management with regard to service delivery may not be achieved as the personnel could be laying much focus on other objectives of records management. It is worth noting that this is an item that cannot be dismissed given the importance that records serve in any institution.

Respondents' Knowledge on Records Management

The researcher asked the respondents how they would describe their knowledge on records management. This was a Likert-scale question and it was determined in terms of mean. A mean of less than 2.5 would mean poor, 2.5 would mean average whereas that of above 2.5 would mean good. This was important as gauging their knowledge on records management would help inform on training areas that they would require. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' knowledge on Records Management

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Respondents knowledge on records management	22	2.00	5.00	3.6818	.71623
Valid N (list wise)	22				

Table 1 showed that the resultant mean is 3.6818 which meant that the respondents' knowledge on records management were good. This was a clear indication that the respondents had relevant training with regard to education on records management. It also meant that the respondents had relevant hands-on experience on records management. Knowledge on records management is a composition of both educational training and hands-on experience. The personnel have sufficient education and training.

The findings of this study, despite the period of study, are not in agreement with that of Johare and Masrek (2011) in Malaysia who found that the records management personnel had insufficiency of education and training. Unlike the finding from Johare and Masrek (2011), the present study has personnel who have knowledge and skills that could enhance their roles and responsibilities. The personnel are in a position to implement standard procedures and policies on records management as part of their main responsibilities. This implies that there could be a likely positive implication on service delivery.

Areas of Training in Records Management

The researcher sought to know if the respondents would require any additional training in records management. The respondents were asked to indicate areas where they would require the training.

This was necessary as it would help inform the recommendations so as to improve service delivery at N.C.C. The study noted one of the respondents suggesting training in electronic records management. This was informed by the fact that majority of records management work is still carried out on paper. Another respondent indicated that there was need for training on current trends in records management covering both modern concepts and practices. Other respondent indicated the need for training in fundamentals of filing and records management. In addition, another respondent cited training in customer care and administrative skills for office assistance. These wide range of areas of training means that the personnel are in need for continuous training to enhance their knowledge, skills and competence. Additional training for the personnel is part of capacity building that organizations and institutions adopt in order to enhance the capability of the staff.

Through the interview with the records manager, it was revealed that the staff will ultimately require training on automation of records as well as their digitization. The records manager emphasized that the limit on space was making it more necessary that digitization has to be part of records management at one time in order to optimize on space. Uwaifo (2004) and Iwhiwhu (2005) reiterate the need for continuous training of records management

personnel in any institution. These findings imply that there is definitely a need for training the records management personnel at N.C.C on various topics.

Formats Used in the Storage of Records

The second objective of the study was to find out the formats used in the storage of records. This was necessary because the format of records is of concern especially with the aspect of accessibility arising from the lifespan of the format. The researcher sought to know the formats used in the storage of records at N.C.C. It was revealed that records at N.C.C were in both manual and electronic formats. The interview with the records manager also revealed that the records at N.C.C are managed through both manual and electronic formats. Studies by both Moloi (2006) and Keakopa (2006) in Botswana and South Africa respectively also established similar findings that records are managed through both manual and electronic formats. In addition, Kalusopa and Ngulube (2012) have their findings concurring with the present one in that they noted that majority of government institutions are predominantly keeping paper based records as compared to electronic records. Manual formats are those that are managed through paper whereas electronic formats are those managed through a computer aided device.

The researcher further sought to establish the predominant format used in the storage of records at N.C.C. All the respondents indicated that the manual format was the predominant one used at N.C.C. the interview with the records manager also revealed that mass records are stored in manual format as opposed to the electronic format. It was revealed that from the interview that this was occasioned by the fact that N.C.C does not yet have adequate resource to enable it roll out mass storage of records in the electronic format. The findings are similar to those of a similar study by Moloi (2006) in Botswana who noted that there was preeminence of paper-based records. Similarly, Keakopa (2006) in a study in South Africa also revealed though there were both

paper-based and electronic formats used in the storage of records, mass of the records were in paper-based formats. This means that N.C.C is yet to fully integrate information and communication technologies in the management of records. The electronic format comes with numerous benefits that override those of paper-based format. Essentially, electronic format has implication on the service delivery in terms of efficiency as compared to the paper-based format.

Challenges Encountered by the Respondents in the Storage of Records

The researcher sought to find out from the respondents the challenges that are encountered in the storage of records. This was important because challenges in the storage of records are linked to service delivery efficiency. The study found that there were a number of challenges encountered in the storage of records at N.C.C. The most cited challenge among the respondents was that there was inadequacy of space for the storage of records. Inadequacy of space hampers orderly management of records which could possibly result to poor service delivery. The study also noted some challenges in the preservation of the records. The preservation challenge would ultimately impact on the lifespan of managing records particularly in paper form and this would essentially translate to poor service delivery.

It was also established from some of the respondents that there was absence of preservation policies at N.C.C. Through the interview with the records manger, it was noted that the working conditions of the records personnel were poor and hence being a challenge in the storage of records. Some of these challenges had been established by other researchers in their studies including that of Popoola (2003) in Nigeria. These myriad of challenges affecting N.C.C records management personnel in the storage of records implies that service delivery to the citizens is in no doubt poor.

CONCLUSION

The records management personnel were competent based on their knowledge and skills on records management. Professionally, the personnel had the requisite knowledge and skills to perform the records management functions. Based on the formats used in the storage of records at N.C.C, the study concludes that a hybrid system of records storage is adopted. The records were stored through both in manual and electronic formats with the predominant format being the manual one that has a myriad of challenges.

Based on the use of ICTs in facilitating storage and retrieval of records at N.C.C, the study concluded that the top management of N.C.C did not have the good will to facilitate full adoption of ICTs in the records management functions. Although few services were offered through technology, a huge chunk of the work is through paper work that was technically inefficient. The study also concluded the availability of records management without its compliance serves no use since it is aimed at standardizing the practices of the records management work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following were the recommendations made in order to enhance public service delivery at N.C.C. First the study recommended that N.C.C top management should provide for annual training on records management. The study also recommended that the top management of N.C.C should have the good will, commitment and support to ensure that digitization and automation of records management activities. In addition, the study recommends that the records manager should establish a mechanism through which the records management policy can be complied with by the personnel.

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