

RECORDS MANAGEMENT AS THE BASIS FOR PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY AT THE KENYA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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ABSTRACT

This research evaluates records management as the basis for public accountability at the Kenya National Assembly. Public and private institutions have obligations to be answerable to those who have assigned such responsibilities to them. Public accountability mainly regards matters in the public domain, such as the spending of public funds, the exercise of public authorities, or the conduct of public institutions. Without proper records management, accountability, transparency and efficiency in organizations would be heavily compromised, leading to corruption and loss of confidence. Efficient records management is key to efficient resources management and public accountability. This study is guided by the following specific objectives; Establish the current records management infrastructure at the Kenya National Assembly; Investigate the extent of Information Communications Technologies use at the Kenya National Assembly in the

management of records for enhanced public accountability; Identify the challenges associated with the management of records at the Kenya National Assembly. The study adopted a qualitative research design and used stratified sampling to come up with 5 staff categories out of 12 categories. Interview is a method of data collection that the research preferred which is explained as a dialogue between two or more people. Various techniques and methods of data presentation and analysis were used: They are: Pie-Charts, Tables and Graphs. Opinions were collected from various officers under the selected departments (ICT, Library section, Registry, and Hansard). The findings were discussed in line with the topic of this research as well as the objectives and thereafter the recommendations were indicated in line with the respondents' perspective.

Key Words: *records management, public accountability, Kenya National Assembly*

INTRODUCTION

Public accountability mainly refers to matters in the public domain, such as the spending of public funds, the exercise of public authorities, or the conduct of public institutions. It is not necessarily limited to public organizations, but can extend to private bodies that exercise public privileges or receive public funding (Scott, 2000). Public accountability implies the rendering of account for matters of public interest, that's an accounting that is performed with action be passed by the citizens. In general, one could say that public accountability is accountability in and about the public domain.

Giri (2000) argues that accountability is not only about being accountable for what one is expected to do or perform, but to one's responsibility beyond the legal minimal, to the growth of oneself and the other, and thus contributing to society. Accountability processes occur self-evidently after activities have been executed or decisions have been taken. Records must possess adequate content, contextual and structural metadata to be self-evident and to facilitate understanding of a particular transaction (Day & Klein, 1987).

According to ethics activist Geoff Hunt, accountability is the readiness or preparedness to give an explanation or justification to relevant others (stakeholders) for one's judgments, intentions, acts and omissions when appropriately called upon to do so. It is in readiness to have one's actions judged by others and, where appropriate, accept responsibility for errors, misjudgments and negligence and recognition for competence, conscientiousness, excellence and wisdom. It is a preparedness to change in the light of improved understanding gained from others (Hunt, 2002)

In comparison to private organizations, public organizations are more exposed to the risks of being held to account, as they are answerable directly to the members of the public. Bearman (1993) argues that government organizations should not focus on structures but on business processes. From the accountability perspectives, government organizations have to provide evidence of business transactions. They will put more effort into creating, capturing and preserving documents concerning their decisions and activities, and by so doing, public accountability is achieved.

The organization more often than not finds it difficult or even impossible to keep records for accountability because they cannot control these records anymore due to poor storage and retrieval conditions. The implications of the use of ICTs for records management and public accountability is also acknowledged as an impending situation but is rarely dealt with and therefore ICTs are regarded as tools that just have to be shaped properly for use for the availability of information for public accountability. With the current situation, it is impossible to retrieve records on time because they are piled up in the constrained available space and equipment as well as inadequate qualified personnel. The researcher therefore sought to evaluate how adhering to records management best practice can elevate the public accountability at the Kenya National Assembly

Records Management Infrastructure

Nashon (2014) citing Mampe and Kalusopa (2012) acknowledged that in order for a records management programme to succeed there should be some level of awareness of the procedures, policies and standards governing the management of records. Cook (1999) argues that good records management begins with establishing policies, procedures and standards before records are created. The purpose of having records management infrastructure such as policies, procedures and standards as well as legislation is to provide guidance and direction on the creation and management of records.

Mnjama and Wamukoya (2007) quoting Griffin (2003) observes that in many governments, policies and guidance for managing records are often non-existent and the legislative and regulatory framework is often weak or out-dated. In some countries the responsibility for managing the information on which government and citizens depend is often unclear. The researcher understands that records management infrastructure in this study controls the records management system that reinforces other controls, thereby reducing the opportunity to tamper with records. The three elements that form organizational infrastructure are; policies, procedures and standards. Records management infrastructure is shown by the

presence of records management policies, records management standards and records management procedures.

Records management infrastructure will not eliminate fraud, but it will tighten the controls on fraud which in turn, directly affects the level of public accountability. Records management infrastructure therefore should be directly incorporated in the conceptual framework to yield results in public accountability. This will strengthen controls on access to records, tighten physical security, track the movement and use of records, and enhance the quality of information, all of which are crucial for holding public officials responsible for their actions.

Information Communications Technologies (ICTs) and Records Management

Administration

ICTs facilities are used in recording all documents pertaining to personnel records which leave schedules, duty roster and inventory of all the physical resources record like furniture stored in the various offices classrooms laboratories and workshop. This includes the use of an HRMS system (Nworgu, 2006).

Management

ICTs can be used for a wide range of records management functions. Potential records management functions to which ICTs are applied include the following: administrative tasks such as correspondence, personnel management, statistics and accounting, or reporting; classification and listing of current records; printing file labels; scheduling of current records; location and tracking of current and semi-current records and boxes; information about authorized users of current and semi-current records; identification of records for disposal; management of physical space and storage for current records; production of management information about the records (Millar, 2009).

Accessibility

The use of ICTs may affect the procedures for creating, preserving and disposing of documents, affect the accessibility of electronic information and may result in new ways in which organizations communicate and execute business processes. In most organizations today records management has not been adjusted yet to these technical and organizational changes (Bikson & Frieling, 1993; Netherlands Court of Audit, 1998). This can only be achieved if the records generated through electronic government are carefully managed through systems providing constant intellectual and physical control. The aim must be to preserve the combination of content, context, and structure which give electronic meaning over time, to protect the fragile media from degradation, and to ensure efficient access and by so doing, the room to positively trigger public accountability is provided.

Storage

According to IRMT (1999), Database management applications are used to store and manipulate many different kinds of information that can be used to classify and catalogue

records, track files, register users, schedule records amongst other uses. Setting up a database to allow records office staff to search for files more quickly impacts a great deal on how the office operates.

Communication

The internet, intranet, and local area networks in conjunction with communications software are used to allow the records staff to communicate from their computers through emails and faxes. Integrated records management software packages are used to track files and box locations, check materials in and out, generate lists of records to be considered for destruction based on retention schedules, and create managerial reports.

Retrieval

The main reason for employing ICTs in management of records is to provide readily up-to-date information. To achieve this, all records are integrated into one database to facilitate speedy retrieval of information. In this age of ‘instant’ information, there is an increasing demand for speedy access to records and the information contained in them. Computers thus permit the collection and aggregation of statistical information which would be very time consuming, if not impossible, to assemble from manual systems. Institutions must ensure that equipment or technology dependent on records should remain accessible for as long as they are required such as audiovisual material and magnetic tapes. This may involve the conversion or migration of some records formats during the time in storage (Latham, 2005).

Challenges to Effective Records Management

Presentation

Like traditional archival materials—books, papers, or film—electronic information is recorded on media that deteriorate with age. However, unlike the traditional archival materials, electronic records are stored in specific formats and cannot be read without software and hardware—sometimes the specific types of hardware and software on which they were created.

Financial Constraints

Challenges facing records management are, by themselves, very important variables that need control. Where accountability is weak, either by denial or lack of demand, power tends to be abused for private gain. In countries throughout the world, public concern about the scale of corruption has focused attention on the need for greater financial accountability aimed at enhancing the use of limited resources toward the objective of poverty elimination. The lack of investment in record-keeping systems over long periods of time has led to a serious decline in the quality of records in many countries. A strategic, long-term approach is essential to building and sustaining solutions. Furthermore, Kemoni (2008) observes a number of weaknesses in the Kenyan Public Archives and Documentation Services Act which include the limited power of the Director in regard to acquisitions and preservation of private records (considered to be private property).

Preservation

The challenge of managing and preserving vast and rapidly growing volumes of electronic records produced by modern organizations is placing pressure on the archival community and on the information industry to develop a cost-effective long-term preservation strategy that would free electronic records of the straitjacket of proprietary file formats and software and hardware dependencies. Patti (2011) sees this is a challenge affected by several factors: decentralization of the computing environment, the complexity of electronic records, obsolescence and aging of storage media, massive volumes of electronic records and software and hardware dependencies.

Retrieval

Organizations spend a tremendous amount of time and money creating, updating and managing vital files and records. MacKechnie (2009) found that the expense of keeping paper files might be acceptable if companies could find each document when it is needed. In reality, paper documents go missing regularly. In some cases, they are simply misfiled. Other times, they are lost forever. In major urban centers, companies regularly outsource their filing to an off-site file management company. When a requested file is not found at an off-site facility, companies must expend tremendous resources retrieving boxes of archived documents, hoping to find the missing document. Some documents are never found, requiring the company to recreate the information or abandon their efforts completely and accept any consequence.

Computerization

Computerization is another challenge that will undoubtedly facilitate the retrieval of information for public accountability. At the same time, unless there is a very well developed capacity for ICTs to manage electronic records as legally verifiable evidence of entitlements, contractual obligations, policies, or transactions for the period required, a mixed media, paper/electronic, records management still suffers where the electronic systems are not in place. Records usually contain important and often confidential information. Securing that information can be a challenge, a fact that Patti (2011) observed that some companies keep vital documents in locked storage, accessible only to authorized personnel.

Security

Records usually contain important and often confidential information. Securing that information can be a challenge, a fact that Patti (2011) observed that some companies keep vital documents in locked storage, accessible only to authorized personnel. Policing access, maintaining access logs and assigning authority levels only add to the cost of storing the documents. Once the document is signed out, there is little the organization can do to ensure the file remains confidential and is not shared on purpose or accidentally with anyone else in the company or outside of it.

Records Continuum Model

The records continuum is a consistent and coherent regime of management processes from the time of the creation of records and before creation, in the design of record keeping systems through to the preservation and use of records as archives. The continuum approach means the end of the traditional demarcation between the functions of the records manager and the archivist. The division of activities into records management and archival phases, with the consequent division of responsibility between the records manager and the archivists is seen by some as artificial and restrictive (Miller, 1996). This means that the records continuum model is significant because it broadens the interpretation of records and recordkeeping systems offered by the lifecycle. Such broadening is helpful, given the variety of context in which archivists and records managers operate and in which archives and records are used.

Upward (1995) asserted that the records continuum as a model concept is based on four principles:

1. A concept of record inclusive of records of continuing value, archives stresses their uses for transactional, evidentiary, and memory purposes, and unifies approaches to archiving/record keeping, whether records are kept for a split second or a millennium.
2. There is a focus on records as logical rather than physical entities, regardless of whether they are in paper or electronic form.
3. Institutionalization of the record keeping profession's role requires a particular emphasis on the need to integrate record keeping into business and societal processes and purposes.
4. Archival science is the foundation for organizing knowledge about record keeping. Such knowledge is revisable but can be structured and explored in terms of the operation of principles for action in the past, the present, and the future.

The continuum purpose-oriented, systems approach to records management fundamentally changes the role of recordkeeping. Instead of being reactive, managing records after they have been created, recordkeeping becomes proactive. IRMT (1999) asserted that amongst the two concepts, the continuum concept is the best practice for managing both electronic and paper records when the aim is to improve responsiveness, increase efficiency, and satisfy user's requirements. The records continuum model's ideal integration can be viewed as a best framework for managing records in a broader context of archival science to connect the past to the present and the present to the future.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative research design in that a qualitative research will be useful in brainstorming and testing new ideas. Bryman (2006) asserted that qualitative research is considered to be particularly suitable for gaining an in-depth understanding of underlying reasons and motivations. It provides insights into the setting of a problem. At the same time, it frequently generates ideas and hypotheses for later quantitative research. According to

Punch (1998) the quantitative method is not sufficient in description, thus lacking an interpretation. It is in line with this that the research adopts a qualitative research to generate rich, detailed and valid process data that contribute to the in-depth understanding of records management practices.

Population

Population possesses “the attributes or characteristics in which the researcher is interested” (Keyton, 2011, p. 121). In this study the population is the Kenya National Assembly that constitutes a population of approximately 1000 personnel and out of this our target population is derived.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The study will adopt purposive sampling technique to come up with the study sample. The sample size includes the number of participants chosen from the whole population. The researcher will focus on the population of the study when drawing a sample. The selected members or part of the entire population is called the sample (Ngulube, 2005). The sampling method determines the validity and reliability of the research conclusion (Ngulube, 2005). The study used a stratified sampling to come up with 5 staff categories out of 12 categories. Ngulube (2005) defines stratified sampling as a type of sampling method where the researcher divides the population into separate groups, called strata. Then, a probability sample is drawn from each group.

Data Collection Instruments

Interview schedule was used. Interview is a method of data collection, which is explained as a dialogue between two or more people. It is also a special case of social interaction. An interview schedule was prepared and pre-tested before being used. The research finds this as the advantage of employing this tool for gathering data.

Data Processing and Analysis

The primary data collected from the field remains in the raw form of statements, digits and qualitative terms. The raw data contains error, omissions and inconsistencies. The researcher requires correcting after careful scrutinizing the completed interview schedules.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The research findings were presented, analyzed, interpreted in line with the aim of the study that was to investigate records management and its role in facilitating public accountability at the Kenya National Assembly.

Records Management Infrastructure

Policies are important because they set out the goals that need to be achieved as well as the guidelines for implementing them. With regard to records management policy, 86 respondents managed to give their views on whether or not the organization has a policy. In

this case, the research revealed that, 25 officers were unaware of a records management policy in the organization. When asked whether the organization had ever revised a records management policy and this is the response:

“We have never seen or heard of a policy that needs revision, what we hear is there is a draft that is awaiting approval from the board”. 29.1% of the interviewed respondents gave the above response.

The researcher also found out that 45 of the officers stated that there is no records management policy that governs the records management practices at the Kenya National Assembly. The same number of respondents would still state that the organization does not revise the policy on records management. This represented a 52.3% of the total respondents. A total of 16 respondents mentioned that the Kenya National Assembly has got a records management policy that governs records management practices but couldn't ascertain whether it has been revised. This represented 18.6% of the respondents.

When asked whether the institution has the said records management policy, there was general uncertainty among the respondents as to whether or not the Kenya National Assembly has a specific records management policy in place. The main purpose of this question was to ascertain whether the institution had a formal records management policy in place and whether or not the records staff members were aware of it.

In terms of records management procedures, the researcher was able to capture a total of 86 responds which shows that all the sampled managed to record their opinions on procedures.

A total of 72 respondents mentioned that they were not aware of the records management procedures at the Kenya National assembly. This represents 83.7% of the total respondents. On the contrary, 14 officers mentioned that they are aware of the records management process in the organization, where they went further to state that records are created, they are stored, accessed and disposed off after use. This means that, 16.3% of the respondents are aware of the records management procedure in the organization. When interviewed the Action Officers had the following to say; “We don't have any guidelines for recordkeeping activities except the general record keeping skills”.

Therefore, the study found no direct and written guidelines for records staff to guide them in carrying out their day-to-day recordkeeping responsibilities.

ICTs in records management

The researcher tested the presence and application of ICTs in management of records. 86 respondents gave their views on the application of ICTs which were then corded to group the views with the same trend together.

Among the 86 six respondents who were interviewed, the research identified that 36 respondents stated that there are no ICT equipment in the organization. This number represents 41.9% of the total responds. This section of the respondents also mentioned that they were aware of the role of the ICT devices but were not able to interact with the devices.

On the other hand, the researcher also identified that 50 respondents recorded that the organization has got various ICT devices. This represents 58.1% of the selected sample. The respondents also mentioned the following are used to manage the organizational information; computers, printers, routers, servers, desk phones, network administrators and scanners.

The researcher wanted to establish whether the department documents its business transactions on digital format and how the records accessed. The researcher interviewed 86 respondents and recorded their views pertaining documenting business requirements for keeping and accessing digital based records.

Some 82 respondents mentioned that the organization does not document the business requirements for storage and accessing of digital based records. This represents 95.3% of the selected sample. 4 respondents stated that the organization documents its business requirements for storage, access and retrieval of digital based records. The same respondents did not record their views on how these records are accessed. This number represents a rate of 4.7% of the responses made by the selected sample.

One record manager respondent revealed that the institution had found it difficult to manage records because the nature of records has changed, from paper to electronic. She responded follows; “I know when I started working everything was in hard copy format. These days the stuff is electronic. There haven’t been any real attempts or drive to move away from the hard copy to electronic in a systematic way and yet most of the records now especially the Hansard are captured electronically we are applying hard copy standards to electronic formats”.

The research tried to establish how the staffs rate their knowledge in electronic records management in general. 35 respondents mentioned that their knowledge of electronic records is fair; 25 stated that they have a good knowledge, 20 respondents recorded that they have very good understanding of electronic records management while 6 mentioned that they have an excellent knowledge.

Challenges and ways of improving records management

The researcher probed the challenges and prospects in management of records at the National Assembly. The 86 respondents recorded their views. When asked on the current challenges being experienced at the Kenya National Assembly the respondents gave the following challenges: Inadequate space; Lack of enough trained personnel; Lack of equipment, supplies and facilities for records; Lack of records management policy; Lack of automated records management program; Non implementation of records policy; Lack of automated records management program; and, Low priority given to records management.

Respondents gave recommendations on what needed to be done to improve records management in the department; central data point for storage of proceedings, records management personnel, use of ICTS and security in the management of information is what the respondents indicated as the better solution for most of the issues raised above.

The researcher sought to establish what were the inherent challenges that the officers at the Kenya National Assembly when accessing their records. When asked to explain the challenges that they experience while using or accessing the records, the following response were given;

The space for storing records is full to capacity; they further said that, we are not able to receive any transfers records to archives because there are no policies on disposal. We store everything on shelves and boxes.

Lack of adequate standards and procedures emerged as a big challenge in that it deters the adherence to international standards. The respondents said that; they cannot weed or destroy any document because it will haunt them later because of repercussions due to no standard policy on disposal.

The researcher found that the other big challenge was the issue of finances for ICT infrastructure that would enable digitization of records for ease of access. One responded said: “Everything here is manual retrieval is by the manual system and can even take several days because of the huge number of volumes in existence”.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that record management at the Kenya National Assembly is fair because the manual systems is still active operating in particular, the capture, classification and filing of physical records. However, the continued use of the system was identified as the main source of problems. There have been attempts to modernize records management in the institution but found that the bulk of the records are still in the paper format. The institution is overwhelmed with the manual system, which manifested as complications with file-tracking, delays in finding files, missing or misplaced files, and opening of temporary files. Thus, the study concluded that the absence of policy, adherence mechanisms to standards and regulatory procedures as well ICTs in use was the biggest challenge.

The current records management manual in place is not backed up by up-to-date guidelines that prescribe day-to-day operations for activities such as the management of electronic records, appraisal and disposal of records. As a result, the current system faces problems, which include poor file-tracking, poor records disposal and congested storage spaces.

The records facilities are congested due to irregular disposal of records, which would clear space at the different stages of the life-cycle. Facilities and tools for the management of records have never been sufficient and the situation is worse because ICT resources have not been incorporated.

Many of the problems identified in this study are attributed to the continued use of archaic manual systems and the absence of ICTs in the institution recordkeeping systems. The manual system proved to be good but it is overwhelmed by too many records generated due to the information revolution. The expansion of parliament after the constitution also meant that more records were generated and there were also more records users than before. With

more records generated, their circulation also became cumbersome and difficult to control manually.

At the same time, the manual system has not been upgraded to incorporate the new challenges of records created in electronic format. Electronic records are a new phenomenon in this technological era. The challenges with managing electronic records were not only about ICT resources but also IT skills. Computers are available but no thought has been put on designing systems to manage the e-records generated by the computers in the manner propagated by the records continuum theory.

Similar neglect and lack of serious commitment by the management has also been reported by the respondents and this is seen through the allocation of spacing with reference to housing the records. The study further concluded that resources, facilities and tools for the management of records are inadequate confirming a common problem. Other than infrastructure, skills and many other requirements, one of the functional requirements for the move to electronic records management systems is to have basic records management systems running in the manual system.

An organization should establish an ongoing training programme for its staff to provide them with adequate knowledge and skills on records management requirements and practices, particularly on creating records during their work, capturing those records into and managing them in designated recordkeeping systems. Records management personnel are qualified but they lack training and exposure to ICTs; the essential elements in today's information management. This also explains why issues to do with ICTs in the management of records remain largely unexplored.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policies and Procedures

Good records management starts with a policy which reflects an organization's needs that underpins procedures and guidelines for the records management at the Kenya National Assembly.

1. Having established that records management policy is missing, the records officer informed that there was a draft awaiting the management approval, the records officer in charge of registry is responsible to oversee its actualization within the organization. The registry is under the directorate of Information and research services who report to the Director General in that order
2. Outline records disposition policies and procedures as an established pattern of systematic document retention and destruction. This prohibits selective destruction of records; Align backup policies with e-mail retention policies as well as develop information security measures to ensure compliance with privacy requirements.

Records Management Standards

The study revealed that the institution has little adherence to records management standards and therefore recommends the following:

- 1) ISO 15489: International Standard for Information and Documentation – Records Management of 2001, gives a high level framework for record-keeping and explains the benefits of good records management, the legal considerations and the importance of making someone responsible for recordkeeping. This part also looks at what's needed for good records management, designing recordkeeping systems (hence the need for ICT skills), records management processes, auditing and training.
- 2) MoReq – Model Requirements for the management of electronic records and specifies requirements for electronic records management systems that describes the relationships between classifications, records, documents, and retention periods. It is applicable to both digital and hybrid records management systems, also describes a number of non-functional requirements, such as document management, workflows, digital preservation and other related aspects.

ICT Infrastructure

With regard to ICT resources, the study revealed that there had not been proper investment in this area. While the institution has some long-term plans regarding this issue, the direct involvement of records staff and departments in these plans was found absent. In addition, the study found out that electronic records were being generated and had been used for a long time but there was nothing tangible found to deal with such records. There was no evidence of any plans to design systems for the management of electronic records before their creation to the last stage of their life-cycle as advocated by the records continuum theory. The researcher therefore recommends a continuum concept as a model of managing institution's electronic records. This can be achieved the participation of records managers in the institution.

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