



The Kenya County Governments' Trust and Evidence in Its Archives and Records Management Systems: The Case of Uasin Gishu County

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Abstract

The World Wide Web and widespread use of various systems have made it possible for consumers and businesses to create and distribute information with only the click of a button in the workplace (Lougee 2002). This has resulted in the oft-referred-to exponential growth in the amount of information generated for business purposes, arising from developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs). However, many organizations in Kenya are yet to formally integrate records management programmes into their business operations to efficiently and effectively manage the large body of digital records generated. Consequently, public sector organisations are exposed to risks resulting from poor records management, which impact negatively upon overall organisational objectives. The objective of this study is to examine the business processes of Uasin Gishu headquarters, to assess the state of archives and records management. The study was based on the records continuum model and the service Canada model used by the Canadian Government. Qualitative research approach was used in the study using a case study design. The respondents included 4 records staff in the registry, 4 IT staff from ICT department and 2 heads of departments. Key findings were that Uasin-Gishu County headquarters generated a lot of paper based records: the state of records management at the County headquarters was poor while service delivery practices were of low standards; the study concluded that the poor state of records management had contributed to poor service delivery making the County Government inefficient in delivery services to the citizens. The study recommends that Uasin-Gishu County should adopt a comprehensive records management and service delivery model. The paper ends by putting forth a strategy for aligning records management and risk management with business processes at Uasin Gishu County Headquarters.

Keywords: Records Management, Risk Management, Business Processes, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

The records management terrain is changing from the traditional paper-based landscape to a digital one, triggered by the increase in digital content. Marr (2015) observes that approximately 90% of data existing in the world today was created within the past two years. Domo (2017) equates this statistic to be equal to more than 1.7 quadrillion data bytes created at any given minutes throughout the world. With such an enormous amount of data created each day, records and information professionals need to rethink and embrace new strategies that are inclined towards modern technologies and services to keep abreast with the pace at which data is being created in business organisations and the society at large (AvePoint 2019). The Kenya Government on July 2011 launched the Kenya Open Data

Initiative (KODI) forum which aimed to empower citizens by enabling them to access data on the country's development agenda and progress. Records on any government activities were hardly available to the public. This was in line with McKinnon (2004) who advocates for an enterprise approach to the lifecycle management of corporate information-regardless of format, driven by Records management and IT units. However, government agencies like the County Governments are ill equipped to implement this initiative.

It is against this background that the present study is undertaken to determine the current state of digital records management at Uasin Gishu County and identify the risks that the County is facing. The study hopes to propose a strategy that the County can adopt to mitigate the risks identified and enhance business performance and operations.

Statement of the Problem

Most organizations in Kenya do not have good archives and record management systems. Uasin Gishu County Government faces the same problem in the management of its archives and records. Missing documents and improper filing systems are basic examples of the challenges that adversely affect its archives and records systems and which consequently becomes a risk to its operations. A spot check at the County headquarters revealed that extremely old files were in use and tedious methods were used in retrieval of files and records. There was no control on the use of records and no vital records program is in place. This paints a picture of a disaster-prone archives and records management that is likely to inhibit service delivery in the county. This study therefore sought to identify risks in archives and records management at Uasin Gishu County headquarters and to recommend a suitable framework for ideal management of archives and records.

Objectives

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the development of a framework to align records management and risk management with business processes at Uasin Gishu County Headquarters.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the business processes of Uasin Gishu County headquarters.
- ii. Assess the state of archives and records management at Uasin Gishu headquarters.
- iii. Establish the risks faced by Uasin Gishu County in relation to its core mandate.
- iv. Develop a framework that can be adopted to align archives and records management with risk management and the business processes at Uasin Gishu County Headquarters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the Records Continuum and the Service Canada models which were triangulated. The Records Continuum model combines archives and records management into one and are managed by both archivists and records managers and archivists. The Service Canada combines physical and virtual approaches in the service delivery.

Digital Records management

Records irrespective of format are an important strategic resource to organisations because of their intrinsic value (Mnjama & Wamukoya 2007). According to IRMT (2009), electronic records are different from manual or paper-based information in a number of ways. Some important qualities of electronic data include: the small 'size' of the data and information; the ease with which data can be replicated; and the consequent portability of electronic data,

which can be moved and used in various locations in the same room or on the other side of the world. Records management is based on the notion that records require managing, in the same sense that other local governmental resources need managing (Dearstyne 1988). Records management should be regarded as important as other governmental operations. Mat-Isa (2005) supports this notion by arguing that a strategic approach to records management is vital in order to facilitate recordkeeping and retrieval. Records represent major sources of information and are almost the only reliable and legally verifiable source of data that can serve as evidence of decisions, actions and transactions in an organization (Wamukoya, 2000).

Digital records management in Kenya

Growth of records management has been slow in Kenya however, due to lack of government prioritisation of the function which boils to the fact that records have not been given due recognition. Reed (2010) points out that information just like any other organisational asset needs to be properly managed to ensure that the information remains secure and is used for the right purposes. Dwoya (2014) reports that it was not until the year 2010, that a standard manual was issued as a guide to all Ministries and State Corporations for the management of their records, marking new developments in records management in the country. The launch of the strategy to automate public sector records as part of reforms to improve service delivery to citizens is another mark to be proud of. Presently, all government sectors in Kenya such as county headquarters, ministries as well as parastatals depend on the strength of records management to operate and deliver their mandate. The widespread use of technology to conduct government activities has resulted in an increased generation of digital records (Mulaudzi et al., 2018).

Records management risks

Despite the crucial role played by records and records management, there is a consensus amongst researchers that many organisations in developing countries including government departments pay little attention to the management of records (Barata, 2001; International Records Management Trust (IRMT), 1999; Mnjama, 2004; Ngoepe and Van der Walt, 2009). There is generally inadequate recognition of the importance of records as evidence and senior officials often tend not to recognize the need for, or value of, effective records programmes (Ngoepe and Van der Walt, 2009). In government ministries of many African countries, records management is widely seen as a lower grade service area, and virtually no attention is given to the way information is created, structured and managed (IRMT, 1999). This is evident in many organisations today where records management tasks are performed by untrained staff. Cain and Millar (2004), notes that the lack of adequate training is closely related to lack of appreciation for and awareness of the importance of records management. Studies undertaken by authors such as Kemoni (2007) distinguish records management problems as the root cause of poor service delivery in public sector organisations and parastatals in Kenya, where untrained staff are deployed to perform records management tasks. Further, a survey conducted by Mnjama and Wamukoya (2004) in Kenya and Botswana, as well as visits to Tanzania, Ghana, The Gambia, and Sierra Leone revealed many problems in the management of records, including:

- Poor layout of the records office especially where records are managed centrally;
- Untidiness in the records area, with records scattered all over the place, on the floor, on top of filing cabinets, along corridors and basements and carpports;
- Regular loss of files and information;
- Lack of file indexes or registers indicating the existence of the record in the organization;
- Lack of retention and disposition schedules;
- Poor storage for semi-current records;
- Poor supervision of records staff, and;

- Ignorance of the value of information, for instance, lack of security procedures in handling sensitive or classified information.

Records management strategy for digital records

Successful records management in the digital workplace still usually relies on users declaring records and tagging them with the appropriate metadata. This process is oftentimes outside of the user's standard routine, which means to maintain compliance, users need to know exactly when something stops being a document and becomes a record then stop what they are doing, navigate to the content, and manually declare their records. Even in the digital age, many organizations still use paper copies of records in some form. Wahyu and Purwaka (2022), proposes that the following questions must be addressed by recordkeeping professionals in organizations:

- Do we understand what data must be kept and how it should be used to ensure we reach our marketing and sales goals?
- What data can we share with third party vendors, and under what terms?
- What versions of these records could be eligible for long term retention as archives, and if so, can we manage their formats, and keep them usable and authentic while technology changes?
- what data should we delete and when?
- How can we ensure that the linkages and relationships amongst the datasets we keep remain intact so we can see the 'whole story' when we need to?

Addressing complex questions such as these requires a methodological approach. Fortunately, the recordkeeping profession has developed such an approach, one that is described in both the International Standard on *Records management* (ISO 15489:2016) and in a new ISO Technical Report, TR 21946:2018, *Appraisal for managing records*.

Records managers' role

Information managers have many and varied responsibilities including establishing business policies, classifying and tagging content, defining business rules and taxonomy structures, and designating actions to push information through its lifecycle. Information managers are also under pressure to constantly prove value across the business, but they face some intense challenges in doing so. As information managers need to oversee the exponential amount of data within the organization and master the content systems in digital records management, they must guide end users along the records management journey. Since information has become digital, relying on end users shouldn't be part of the strategy anymore.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach. A case study research design was used, with Uasin-Gishu County being selected as the unit of study. Out of a target population of 15, 10 respondents were selected purposively to participate in the study. The respondents include 4 records staff in the registry, 4 IT staff from ICT department and 2 heads of departments. Face to face interviews and non-participant techniques was used to gather the required data. Analysis of the data was done thematically based on the content analysis.

RESULTS

The County Business Process

The first objective of the study was to examine the business processes of Uasin Gishu County headquarters.

The Uasin-Gishu County business process is a mixture of both manual and electronic operations that serve the clientele. The County has also operations that are online and supported by the mobile banking systems that are available in Kenya. The areas where

notable electronic systems exist include, E-revenue, hospital, enterprise fund and external links among others. The car park fees payment for instance is done through the mobile money service *mpesa* while the staff of the department was concerned with compliance. The finance department handles financial transactions that are captured by the Integrated Financial and Information Management System (IFMIS), which makes part of their operations computerized. The ICT staff on the other hand was engaged in the implementation and maintenance of computers at the headquarters. They provided networking, installations of software and small scale training for the County staff on how to use and maintain the ICT resources at the County headquarters.

The State of Records Management at Uasin Gishu County Headquarters

Another objective was assessing the state of records management at Uasin Gishu County headquarters. For more insights into the records management practices, the records staff was asked how vital records were managed. Their response was that they did not have any program for vital records. Similarly, when asked how prepared they were for records related disasters; they all responded that they did not have any disaster management program.

Staffing of the County Records Management Services

The study sought to determine the qualification levels of staff responsible for records management at the County. The respondents were first asked to identify the groups that managed records at the County headquarters. All the two heads of departments indicated that records management at the County headquarters was under the custody of two main groups namely, the record officers and the clerical officers.

'The records are mainly under the records officers and the clerical officers who also control information matters of their offices with their respective Action Officers' (interview 1 of the Heads of Departments interviews)

Risks faced by Uasin Gishu County in relation to its core mandate

The study also sought to establish the risks faced by Uasin Gishu County in relation to its core mandate. The Uasin Gishu Headquarters is faced with a number of risks that could impede its core mandate as illustrated below: The Uasin Gishu headquarters lacked a policy to guide in the access of its records. The confidential records were kept by the Chief Officers and Action Officers as stated by the two heads of departments. This meant the safety of the records whether paper or digital was not guaranteed leave alone the misuse of the same. The ICT staff had the liberty to access and to share any of the sensitive records in their custody as stated by the two respondents. There were no audit trails to monitor the use of these records. The County headquarters did not adhere to a strict regime of filing and many records as observed were scattered in all the County Offices. The file movement registers were not fully adhered to. The records staff noted that certain members of staff had a habit of keeping some records for their own use and denying other user access to the same whenever there is need. The County government has not adopted any standard that will ensure the availability of the records in the time of need. The government has not adopted any vital records management program for its very key records and it doesn't have a disaster and recovery management program that will ensure continual operations in case of a bad eventuality. The County headquarters had not done much to ensure the safety of the records in its custody. In particular, the electronic records were scattered in the numerous county offices, while there was no control on accessibility and safety of the same.

Ideal Archives and Records Framework

The respondents gave various suggestions on how an ideal archives and records management system could be managed. Chief amongst that included; that the archives and records system must be handled professionally on all the tasks therein as stipulated in the laws of the land and statutes of the county government. Archival and records management

standards but be adhered to based on approved international Standards. The laws that govern archives and records management must be reviewed to meet the technological advances and ideal hardware and software be sought and which must adhere to trust and evidential values of anarchies and records.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study revealed the importance of records in support of County services which at the end ensures quality in service provision. Each County activity generated records and these records were required in service provisions. This therefore required an effective records management in order to ensure quality service provision. Wamukoya (2000) underpins the importance of records management in the public sector elaborating its importance in accountability, rule of law, efficiency, effectiveness and transparency. Records are also important as a source of information that is dependable, verifiable, and legal and serve as evidence of decisions, actions and transactions in the public service. Blake (2005) states that an effective records management includes supporting efficient joint working and information exchange, evidence-based policy making and supporting administration of data protection principles and effective implementation of freedom of information and other legislations through good organization of records. The study however reveals shortcomings on records management which has consequently made service provision ineffective due to lack of a records management policy and no consistent instructions on records management. The records officer's roles are limited to registries and have no role over the entire county records management. The staff in charge of records namely the records officers and clerical officers are not adequately trained on records management and many were demoralized due to lower grading in the profession. There is too much emphasize on paper records as against electronic records which many get lost or mismanaged due to lack of an electronic records management system in place. There is no proper records scheduling, appraisal and disposal of records. All this consequently affects service provision of the Uasin-Gishu County government.

Records capture virtually all the county activities like the human resource management with elements like dates of appointments, education levels and entitlements. Records are utilized in other wide varieties like marketing, investment, auditing and are very key in land transactions as it gives evidence. The public is served based on the records they provide to the county staff and the public in reciprocation are handed records to justify services provided.

The County Government has invested on ICT installations across its headquarters with a vibrant data centre with a LAN network and desktop computers in many offices. The national IFMIS system serves quite a lot of financial transactions. However, the management of electronic records is not up to any standards. Many e records are not properly captured, appraised, disposed and stored. This has led to gross inefficiency on e-records management. The electronic records are in the custody of each county office and the records professional have no role in its management. This has resulted in numerous opportunities to minimize paper records and to make many operations of the county digital.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the County Government archives and Records Management system indicates a risk a disaster in waiting. The Archives and Records Management systems was manned with very little inputs such as less resources input at their disposal, lack of proper equipment and lack of space, poor materials used amongst may others shortcomings. The Archives and records were also not managed as per the stipulated national standards or legislations and

there was not confidentiality and vital records were not well attended to. The County government must invest in proper resources in terms of space and staffing. The County government needs to develop a proper Archives and Records management system that captures stores and dispose of these resources. It should also invest on the protection of its resources while appreciating proper utilization. Public archives and records must be managed separately from the private ones in order to ensure integrity of the same.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Records management policy

To deal with weaknesses and lack of records management program, the Uasin-Gishu County government should develop policies that address programs for the entire county government. This should standardize records management and ensure professionalism in order to support service delivery in the County.

Records management general practices, procedures and guidelines

The program should capture all business processes activities of the county government. It should strive to set records management standards through the records continuum from creation to disposition of records across the unique and entire county government business activities. The program should specify correct space requirements, equipment, operations procedures and allied requirements. The program should also capture ISO 15489 standard on records management as well as to meet the legal provisions of public records in Kenya. The County government should consult with the Kenya National and Documentation Services on the development of a draft policy, standards to adopt, guidelines and procedures for various functions. The County government should employ adequate number of trained records management staff in the all its offices. It should also improve on the storage of records and to streamline records by adhering to proper capture and dissemination of its information.

Staffing of the County records management service

Having a records manager to oversee records management activities at the county headquarters will provide leadership that is currently lacking at the County headquarters. There should be a senior officer at the higher level in the managerial structure of Uasin-Gishu County government preferably reporting to the top management organs to ensure harmonization of records management and service delivery procedures and practices across the entire County. This will ensure standardization of records management practices like scheduling and disposal and compliance to all records management procedures. This will instil professional practices in records management for the sake of good service delivery. The County staff development and training section should invest in staff training in records management in all the county headquarters staff who handle and use records. This is essential in addressing the weaknesses of inadequate professionalism in records management at the county headquarters as revealed by the study findings which in turn supports service delivery by creating an understanding on the importance of records management and service delivery.

Integration of ICT into records management and service delivery

The County headquarters should develop a clear plan on records management that include the electronic aspects. The ICT installations at the County should include the elements of electronic records management and the staff be sensitized on the need of a proper electronic records management. The county government should utilize electronic records management systems in order to ensure proper storage, scheduling and disposal of records. All these aspects should be linked to all service delivery strategies of the County government.

Top County Government Support

A great factor contributing to this state of affairs was lack of adequate resources and a dedicated budget for records management activities. The study recommended that the County top government should give maximum support on records management activities in form of policy statement support and increased budgetary allocations.

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