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# ALIGNMENT OF ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT TO THE BUSINESS PROCESSES: A COMPARISON OF TWO UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## Abstract

This paper is a synopsis of the findings of a PhD Degree in Information Science that sought to develop the archives and records management framework by using the University of Venda and the University of the Witwatersrand for comparison. The study sought to assess the state of archives and records management at selected universities. The study was based on the records lifecycle model and the findings indicated that poor archives and records management programmes at universities have been a source of risk exposure leading to inefficiency in business processes. The results revealed a significant lack of alignment of archives and records management programme with business processes. The study recommends the adoption of Archives and records management framework.

**Key words:** Archives, records management, universities, University of Venda, University of Witwatersrand

## Introduction

As governmental bodies, the University of Venda and the University of the Witwatersrand generate records cutting across business activities that need to be managed in terms of the National Archives and Records Service Act (No. 43 of 1996). Universities, as public organisations, must fulfil certain legal requirements and adhere to recordkeeping as stipulated by the South African statutory regulation. Thus, they need to be able to manage their archives and records effectively in their business operations (Cheng 2018:24). It is essential to manage records of business transactions to sustain an organisation. It appears that records management is not recognised as an essential function at the South African universities. This low profile of records management functions results in a lack of integration of the archives and records management (ARM) programme into business processes. The study conducted by Van Wyk and Du Toit (2016:109) indicated that it was necessary to assess the causes of a poor Archives and Records Management (ARM) programme at South African universities. The mostly affected universities were historically disadvantaged universities.

## **Background to the study**

The study compared the ability of the University of Venda and the University of the Witwatersrand to develop an ARM framework. While the University of the Witwatersrand was established in 1922, the University of Venda was established in 1980 as a branch of the University of the North (Habib 2016:37). The major challenge confronting both universities is that they don't have an effective ARM programme integrated into business processes. The study conducted by Koopman and De Jager (2016:47) indicated that during the apartheid period, there was no evidence of any overarching process for collection, analysis and dissemination of information. This means that South Africa entered the democratic era in 1994 with an inefficient ARM programme that characterised the higher education system (Habib 2016:36). An effective ARM programme is one of the requirements of the integrated business process management programme, i.e., without an ARM essential records being generated by universities are not captured, which is a loss to the institution's corporate memory.

## **Problem statement**

University records remain a fundamental element for good governance and accountability to all universities. Proper records management facilitates good governance, accountability, transparency and access to information (Garaba 2018). As observed by Sulej (2009:169)". Lack of proper ARM framework has been identified as a compliance risk to an efficient institution of higher learning in South Africa". However, the universities face challenges of lack of integration between records and archives with business processes which leads to the loss of institutional memory. Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) observed then that while the majority of university's records managers recognise the importance of documenting the business activities of universities, they have not integrated records and archives processes to integrated business processes. The success of an ARM programme depends on the existence of a strong ARM framework that will enable integration into business processes (Garaba 2018). Without effective records management, it is almost impossible to plan and administer any formal organisation effectively (Cheng 2018:205). It is this background that informed this study; hence, the research sought to analyse the integration of the ARM programme to business functions.

## **Aim of the study**

This paper sought to investigate the extent to which an ARM programme was aligned with business processes at both the University of Venda and the University of the Witwatersrand to propose an ARM framework in line with best practice standards at the university. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- assess the level of ARM programme alignment to the university business processes
- propose an ARM framework for the university.

## **Theoretical framework**

The lifecycle theory is used as the theoretical framework in this study and it has its origin in biology and has spread to less organic sectors such as the managerial and records management fields (Ngulube 2011). The lifecycle theory states that records must be managed

from creation to disposal, irrespective of format (Abankwah, 2011). In the records management context, the theory assesses the creation, distribution, use and disposal of records. Every stage of the lifecycle of records management requires appropriate strategies and formats of management. The overarching consideration to choose this theoretical framework was to improve records management and to make records management processes more efficient and cost-effective. The records lifecycle provides a framework for understanding ARM responsibilities. The proponents of the records lifecycle theory state that records management constitutes a good ARM, which are prerequisites to a good university administration. This paper argues that while a model for managing electronic records, such as a records continuum, can be applied to university records, the traditional practices of managing records through the records lifecycle model are still applicable to university records management.

## **Research methodology**

This study adopted a comparative case study approach aimed at collecting data about ARM processes at the University of Venda and the University of the Witwatersrand, and their impact on business processes at the institutions. Qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed to collect the data using interviews and documentary reviews. Before embarking on the data collection process, the researcher sought official permission from both the universities involved. The researcher fully explained the study to the participants in advance. Clear and accurate information about the research study was given to all the study subjects before commencement of the study. The participants were informed about the aim and objectives of the study and their decision to participate in the study was purely voluntarily. During and after the study, the identity of all the respondents remained anonymous. The researcher designed semi-structured interview schedules consisting of open-ended questions for each category of respondents following the research objectives.

The selected participants were heads of various departments and divisions within the selected universities. However, in the field, a total of 35 (87,5%) participants from both universities who agreed to participate in the interview processes, completed consent forms as permission to be interviewed. In line with O’Leary (2017:205), the interviews were audio-recorded to support data analysis. In the case of 40 participants, a response rate of 35 (87,5%) is considered adequate for successful research. In support of the above argument, Curtis and Curtis (2011:37) indicate that there is no set formula to determine sample size.

## **Literature review**

The development of a framework is the foundation of building an ARM programme. The study conducted by Iwhiwhu (2005:346) indicated that universities should develop the ARM framework to integrate their business process into the ARM processes. The pillars of university functions are based on the ARM programme, which integrates business processes with ARM processes. This is because every business is involved in the production of records in its activities (Ngulube 2011). According to Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005:10), “the core function of universities is teaching and learning, research, engagement and partnerships and administration”. Carrying out the roles of universities generates, analyses and advances records that provide evidence that the university is carrying out its statutory functions in accordance with the Higher Education Act (No. 107 of 1997). Singh and Ramutsheli (2016:177) indicate that the alignment of ARM was essential to support research, engagement and partnership of the universities’ functions. An understanding of the business

activities of the respondents was useful in establishing the importance of an ARM programme and to show how records management underpinned the business operations of the institutions.

### **University administration**

The role of the university administration is to make provision for education, teaching and learning at universities, as well as research, engagements and partnerships. Records management is the discipline that governs processes and controls the creation and management the records of an organisation to support its operation (Cheng 2018:204). The study conducted by Iwhiwhu (2005:347) indicated that universities' records constitute the application of administration without which operational processes and functions cannot be executed. University processes such as admissions and registration produce records essential for the operational functioning of institutions. This statement is underscored by Nwaomah (2015:16) who argues that universities' business processes create records of an administrative nature, and of historical, financial and evidential value. Paterson (2005:126) highlights a need for an amalgamation of integrated enterprise business processes into the ARM process. For example, there is no integration of records management processes with business processes at the various Nigerian universities (Popoola 2007:33). The incorporation of the ARM framework encompasses the creation and integration of records from the sources of division, and the sharing of such records to units.

The use of information communication technologies (ICT) in public information centres should be within a methodological framework. The perceived starting point for archives to employ ICTs as communication devices is to have a clear framework that defines the use of new technologies (Chaterera 2015). The implementation of electronic technologies improves efficiency, even after ongoing maintenance costs are factored in. Universities devote large amounts of capital in the building of technology platforms and business applications to support organisational activities that would fulfil their institutional mandate (Katu 2018). Information technology departments build systems and they create heritages based on corporate norms that might no longer hold.

Effective management of technology assets necessitated the development of portfolio management techniques and models to map out the complete ICT ecosystem in their institutions. ICT is of central importance within universities in all disciplines and holds the potential to advance learning and development. ICT provided opportunities for effective partnerships (Collins 2014:52). It may be advisable for ARM institutions to incorporate a hands-on module on e-records management in the curricula (Tsabedze 2019). Ferguson-Boucher and Convery (2011:231) agree with this statement by indicating that ARM strategies are successful when they are aligned with organisational enterprises of legal, structural, system and operational levels. Improvements in organisational performance are attained through aligning records management planning and institutional planning (Paterson 2005:116). Similarly, Van Wyk and Du Toit (2016:112) specify that records management policy should be aligned with universities to improve organisation performance.

### **Teaching and learning**

It is the duty of universities to disseminate information through teaching and learning as they are the providers of education to equip communities with information and knowledge (Wessels & Van Jaarsveldt 2007:109; Collins 2014:55). This statement agrees with Adham et

al. (2015:516) who states that, “universities are to establish education toolkit through teaching and learning”. The establishment of the ARM programme serves as an enabler to support the establishment of tutorials and schoolkids. The study conducted by Velescu (2013:277) showed “teaching requires the development of trustworthy records to serve as a toolkit during teaching and learning”.

Literature reviews indicated that universities paid little attention to the preservation of archives to serve as educational material (MacNeil & Eastwood 2017:357). Most of the universities from the developed countries utilised archives as part of the education toolkit during school teaching and learning. At the University of British Columbia, the University of Toronto and the University of California in Los Angeles, and Simmons College, archives complemented educational materials for teaching and learning (MacNeil & Eastwood 2017:359). This implied that some of the lectures and archivists enterprise educational toolkit of a course, such as history and architectural science, used archives as a method of teaching.

The review of literature in Africa found that an ARM programme is not yet at maturity level stage to design an educational toolkit. The study conducted by Erima and Wamukoya (2012) found that the Moyo University in Kenya did not have an ARM programme to design an educational toolkit for teaching and learning. The study conducted by Netshakhuma (2019e:25) found that there was no partnership between communities surrounding universities in South Africa and universities to offer educational materials. Hence, the establishment of an ARM programme is the pillar of the educational toolkits for teaching and learning.

## **Research**

Research is one of the fundamental functions of a university. Studies conducted by Chirikov (2013:457) and Iwhiwhu (2005:346) indicated that, “universities collect and analyse records during the process of research”. Abdulrahman (2015:48), Delaney and De Jong (2015:85) and Brown (2014:128) concur that records are sources of research information that serve as a legal copyright depository produced by societies. Similarly, Brown (2014:123) indicates that research conducted in various communities needs to be preserved in the archives.

In the United States of America, at the University of Ottawa, records collected and analysed during research conducted by local, national and international researchers were preserved in the university archives (Bowker & Villamizar 2016:305). This was contrary to the research conducted even though most of the South African universities, such as the University of Johannesburg, did not have a framework to preserve research conducted by communities (Rodrigues, Van der Walt & Ngulube 2014: 95

The study conducted by Chirikov (2013:457) indicated that, “universities are repositories of records generated through research”. Information is disseminated to various stakeholders through research. The study conducted by Iwhiwhu (2005:346) stated that, “records are created, analyse and disseminated during research processes”. Abdulrahman (2015:48) and Brown (2014:128) indicate that records are primary sources of information for research that serve as a legal copyright depository produced by societies. University archives played a societal role as a collector of social and cultural record research (Delaney & De Jong 2015:85). Similarly, Brown (2014:123) indicates that communities’ archives need to be researched and preserved in the archives.

## **Engagements and partnerships**

Universities should be accountable to society by creating and retaining knowledge via records and archives. Universities partner with stakeholders dealing with ARM to improve compliance and effectiveness (Leresche 2008:09; Bowker & Villamizar 2016:305; Sobczak 2015:231; Leveille & Timms 2015:172). Stakeholders interested in the ARM programme include auditing, the community, national organisations and international organisations enforcing compliance with legislation governing an ARM programme. Wagner (1999:121), Bowker and Villamizar (2016:61) and William (2006:369) hypothesise that universities can embark on partnerships at international, national and community level to improve compliance with the legislation governing the ARM programme. Within an organisation, a partnership can be established between ICT, legal practitioners, finance managers and compliance officers to improve the state of the ARM programme, preservation of archives, promote and marketing of ARM programme (McIntosh 2011:150; Allen 2017:10). ARM stakeholders provide an advisory role for features related to auditing, adhering to ARM standards on disposal of records, appraisal and aligned ARM programme with integrated enterprise information management business processes (Allen 2017:13; Bowker & Villamizar 2016:305). There was an absence of partnership of South African universities compared to universities from developed countries, such as the USA and Australia. Most South African universities have limited partnerships with the communities.

A partnership between the ARM division and other internal university divisions, departments and units is viewed as a form of buy-in by the researcher. An ARM programme requires a partnership between the ARM division and other internal divisions (Kyobe, Molai & Salie 2009:3) and is positioned to partner with other divisions, departments or units throughout the records' lifecycle (Duranti 2012:15). The internal partnership enables the control of records throughout the records lifecycle. This implied that records managers and archivists amalgamated with the creator of records to improve the ARM programme (Ngoepe & Ngulube 2014:148).

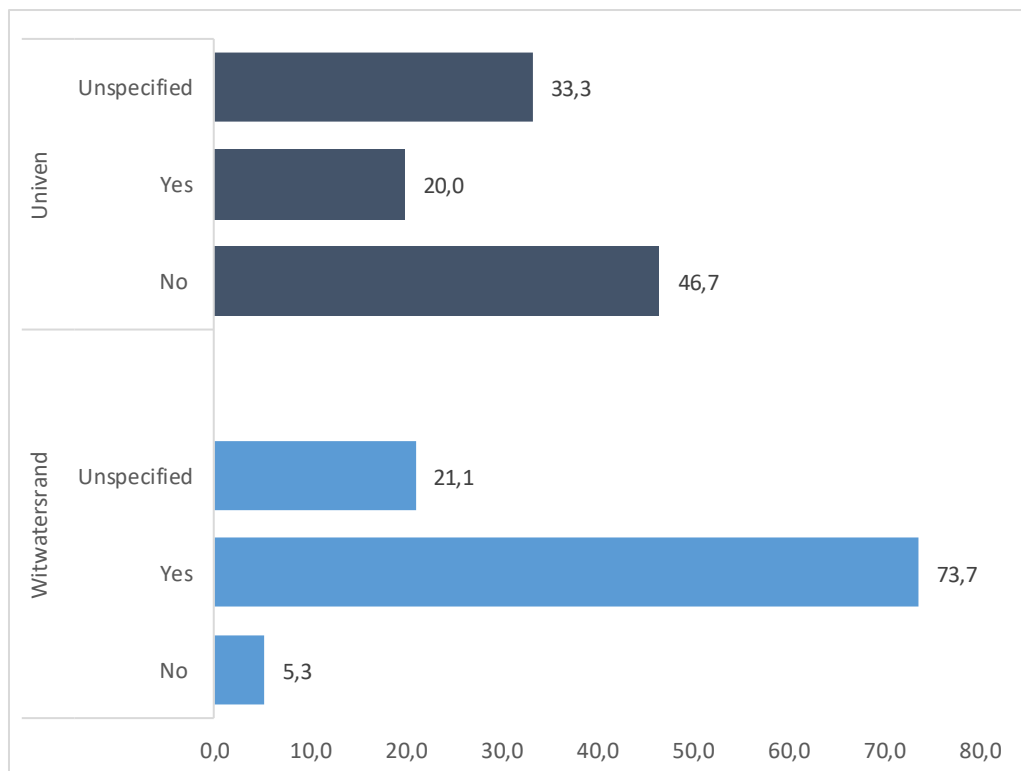
The study conducted by Ngoepe and Ngulube (2014:148) found that the absence of a partnership between the ARM division and other internal divisions, departments and units in South Africa contributed to the lack of business process integration with ARM processes. Similarly, IRMT (1999) and Cunningham (2015:537) found that collaboration between departments and other professions is necessary to improve accountability, transparency and good governance. Archivists and records managers require strong alliances such as the head of the public service and the auditor-general. Studies conducted by Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) and Netshakhuma (2019c:639) concluded that records managers and archivists from most of the universities in South Africa such as the University of Kwazulu-Natal, the University of Cape Town and the University of Johannesburg worked in isolated from other divisions, department and units.

These findings were contrary to international institutions where there is collaboration within universities' internal divisions, departments or units. For example, the University of Arkansas Archives partners with various departments such as the library department, research department, corporate supports service and the communication department to integrate business processes with ARM processes (Allen 2017:4). The University of Ottawa's ARM division partners with the Office of the Registrar, the Office of the Vice-Chancellor and the library service division to promote the ARM programme (Bowker & Villamizar 2016:302). The University of Illinois' ARM division collaborated with the Department of

Communication Services to promote and disseminate the value of ARM to the University Community (, Eaton & Schwartz 2015:10). Furthermore, the University of Illinois' ARM division, in collaboration with the library and research and innovation department, established a metadata project to promote access to information.

## Data presentations and findings

The data obtained quantitatively were analysed using SPSS, and the data obtained qualitatively were content analysed. Table 1 provides a summary of the integrated enterprise information management business process alignment to the ARM process. The findings reported here are based on responses to the face-to-face interviews conducted using interview schedules prepared by the researcher. The results are presented according to the research objectives of the study. The ARM processes are an integral part of the enterprise information management business processes. It is associated with the workflow based on administrative and legal compliance. As demonstrated in figure 1 below, the participants were asked the question about the ARM processes' alignment with the university processes. As compared to Wits whereby 14 (73,7%) of the participants indicated that ARM processes were aligned to the university processes, 7 (46,7%) of the participants at UNIVEN indicated that ARM and university processes were not aligned. These results were contrary to the researcher's observations from studies conducted at both universities because of a lack of alignment of ARM processes to the universities' business processes.



**Figure 1: Enterprise information management business process alignment to the archives and records management process**

Based on the above results, weak ARM processes' alignment with institutional processes impacted on the poor regulatory compliance and litigation; the allocation of resources and



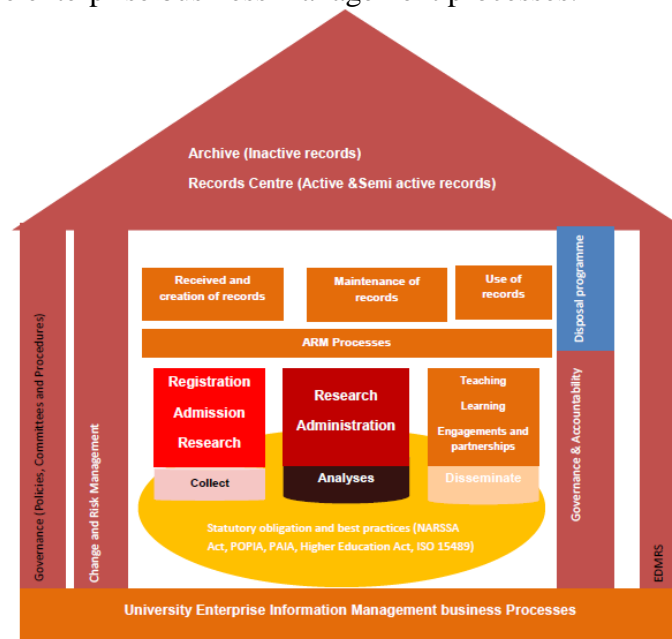
business improvement efforts, and increased the level of risk associated with records management and a lack of performance monitoring. Given the development of information communication technology, it is a necessity to align ARM functions to university processes to ensure a corporate-wide approach to compliance with the National Archives and Records Service Act. The alignment would lead to a situation where records management is recognised as a business issue. This analysis provided a baseline for the development of the university’s ARM framework.

The study established that at both universities, the ARM function is not fully aligned with the business transaction processes. This finding was echoed by Netshakhuma (2019a:60) who specifies that a dearth of processes and procedures led to an inefficient ARM programme. During the site visit, the research confirmed a lack of ARM alignment with the university’s business processes. This implied that ARM processes were not embedded in both university processes. This finding contradicts the finding by Phiri and Tough (2018:56) who indicate that ARM embedded in business processes and governance structures contributes to accountability, transparency and governance of institutions.

The internal departments’ collaboration enhances the effective ARM programme in the universities. The researcher found that at Wits, the ARM department collaborated with the library department while at UNIVEN, there was a lack of archives and records management collaboration with internal departments. The results of this study are supported by Kaczmarek (2006:26) who indicates that collaborations between internal departments would contribute to the development and implementation of ARM programmes.

## Recommendations

The proposed framework for the management of universities in South Africa provides a structure that can be used to promote a collective approach to the management of university records as part of the enterprise business management processes.



### *Key components of the framework*

This section explains the key components of the framework, which is informed by the integrated university enterprise information management business process. The university enterprise information management business processes are guided by the statutory obligation and best practices such as the NARSSA Act (43 of 1996), Protection of Personal Information Act (4 of 2013), International standards organisations 15489 and Higher Education Act (No. 1 of 1997). This means that universities have to put governance in place such as information and records management policies and committees.

Universities collect, analyse and disseminate information during the execution of their functions. They collect information during student admission, registration and research. Universities' information is analysed during research and administration of the duties. The university community (i.e. students, lecturers and staff) conducts a university's research and research is conducted by external stakeholders through university engagement and partnerships. The university analyses the types of records needed to be preserved by external communities for transferral to the university community. After the collection and analysis of information, such information is disseminated through teaching and learning. Archives and records management processes involve the receiving and creation of records during the collection stage of records. Records are maintained during the process of records analysis. Thereafter, records are maintained and used by ensuring that file plans and records management procedures are in place to ensure records preservation.

Governance and accountability are dependent on an effective ARM programmes. This means that decision-making is dependent on an effective records management programme. The proper management of records contributed to an effective disposal programme that includes an appraisal of records, disposal of records and preservation of archival materials. This means that there would be an effective process to transfer archival materials to the archives repository while records with short-term value are disposed of. The adoption of the Electronic Document Management and Records System (EDMRS) is recommended for an organisation to implement a systematic disposal programme.

## **Conclusion**

Being academic institutions, the University of Venda and the University of the Witwatersrand are mainly engaged in facilitating teaching, learning and research activities. Making significant improvement in managing university records in the future will be heavily dependent on appropriately integrating the ARM programme into university business processes. These core business processes are supported by an archives and records management programme, which results in the generation of records in both paper and electronic formats. Therefore, the records created by these universities should be managed from the creation stage until the disposal stage. The study findings revealed a poor state of records management functions that led to misalignment of records from creation until the disposal stage of records. Factors that contributed to poor records management included non-alignment of the records management programme with the business programme to guide records management activities, shortcomings resulting from the manual records management system in use, and changing technologies and data security, among other things. To alleviate these shortcomings, it will be prudent for both the University of Venda and the University of the Witwatersrand to adopt and integrate records management with business processes.

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