RECORDS MANAGEMENT AUDIT: THE CASE OF GABORONE CITY COUNCIL

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Abstract

This study aimed at auditing records management practices at Gaborone City Council (GCC). The study sought to establish how records are created, used, maintained and disposed of at GCC. It also sought to determine the usage of information communication technologies in the creation, maintenance, use and disposition of records, the existence or non-existence of records management policies and procedures, as well as records security measures at GCC. A case study methodology was used and questionnaires were distributed to 35 officers selected from senior members of staff and records/ administrative personnel. Personal observations were carried out and interviews were conducted to substantiate data gathered from the questionnaires. The study revealed that GCC lacks organization-wide policies and procedures for the creation, use, maintenance and disposition of records resulting in uncoordinated procedures for managing its records and that most of the processes for managing records were manual. The study recommends that GCC develops and implements Council-wide records management policies and procedures to ensure the creation and maintenance of authentic, reliable, complete and useable records, capable of supporting business functions and activities for as long as they are needed.

Keywords: Records Management Audit, Gaborone City Council, Records Management

Introduction

Records management as a discipline plays numerous roles in various organizations such as academic institutions, in government at national, state, regional and local level, in public and private corporations, and institutions of all types and sizes. The roles played by effective records management include supporting efficient joint working and information exchange, facilitating good governance, protection of human rights, risk management and effective implementation of freedom of information laws and other legislation. Other roles include supporting accountability by providing reliable records of actions and decisions and knowledge management across sectors of government by making reliable information available for sharing, extraction and summarisation (Kemoni and Ngulube 2008:300). According to Ngulube (2009:136) without proper records management, accountability, transparency, and efficiency in public service delivery would be heavily compromised, leading to corruption and loss of confidence in the civil service. The guiding principle of records management is to ensure that information is available when and where it is needed, in an organized and efficient manner, and in a well maintained environment. To ensure that records systems and processes are effective, compliant and risk free, organizations require periodical records management audits.

Records serve as a source of evidence of governments' performance in pursuance of service and excellence and are the benchmark upon which present and future decisions and activities of government are predicated. Shepherd and Yeo (2006: 6) state that there are three key values which can be met by good records. First, organizations use records in the conduct of current business, to enable decisions to be made and actions taken. Secondly, organizations use records to support accountability, when they need to prove that they have met their obligations or complied with best practice or established policies. Thirdly, systematic management of records allows organizations to promote timely access to organizational information required to make informed decisions thereby enhancing organizational performance, provide evidence of business transactions or activities carried out by

public institutions, facilitate performance of activities throughout an organization, protect the rights of the organizations, their employees and customers as well as protecting the records from inappropriate and unauthorized access.

Abell (2004:12) defined an information audit as "a process undertaken to identify an organization's information needs and assets, the way they are met, how the assets are created and how they are managed." He went further to suggest that an information audit helps to gain an organizational understanding of:

(a) Where and how information is created;

(b) Information flows and bottlenecks;

(c) Information gaps and duplication;

(d) Information quality, impact and value;

(e) How well information is managed to meet legal and contractual requirements; and

(f) How information is being managed and used to support business objectives.

The section that follows provides background information to Gaborone City Council (GCC) where the study relating to the records management audit was conducted.

Gaborone City Council

Gaborone, the capital city of the Republic of Botswana, was established as the national capital in 1963 and upgraded from town to city status on 1 July 1986. The city's population had grown to a population of 6000 people by 1966 when Botswana attained its independence from Britain. Since then, Gaborone has been experiencing the region's highest population growth in relative terms. The population increased from 17, 718 in 1971 to 59, 656 in 1981. This represented an annual growth rate of 12.9%. The population of the city continues to grow fast especially due to rural urban migration. Today, the rate at which the population grows is estimated at 8.4% per annum. Gaborone City Council is a local authority under the Ministry of Local

Government. It was established by an Act of Parliament Cap. 40:01 in 1966 and constitutes both the political and administrative arms. The political arm manages the financial aspect of the Council by approving proposed budgets and awarding of tenders. Administratively, the City Council is headed by a Town Clerk who implements decisions of the Council and oversees the general management of the Council. Currently, the political arm is composed of 35 councillors (30 elected and 5 nominated) who amongst themselves elect a Mayor and a Deputy Mayor at the beginning of each year.

The councillors are mandated to perform certain duties through the various committees such as: tenders, budgetary issues, allocation of residential plots to the low income category, health related issues, land use applications, trading applications, primary education, and community development etc. The technical responsibilities fall under the various departments within the GCC. These departments are: Commercial Section, Environmental Health Department Services, Education Department, Engineering Department, Physical Planning Unit, Social and Community Development Department, Sewerage Services, Department of Architecture and Buildings. The functions of each of these Sections are described below:

(a) Commercial Section

This section is charged with the responsibility of issuing of trade licences for businesses operating in the city. The licences are for specialised dealers, bottle stores, wholesalers, hawkers and street vendors.

(b) Environmental Health Department

This department is mandated with the responsibility of providing environmental health services to the general public. The major functions of this department are to ensure a safe, healthy and clean environment. The department comprises the following sections: waste management services, landfill, abattoir, health education, public toilets, pest control and control of communicable diseases and inspectorate which cuts across all the sections mentioned above. The inspectorate is responsible for:

(i) inspection of business/industrial premises to ensure compliance with health statutes in relation to trading licences;

(ii) collection of water samples for bacteriological and chemical analysis to ensure that the water is safe for consumption;

(iii) enforcement of occupational health and safety laws to ensure that the   public health of people is safeguarded;

(iv) Participation in the assessment of residential, commercial, industrial and institutional architectural drawings to ensure that they conform to the public health and building control Acts.

(c) Education Department

Primary education in Botswana is core-managed by the Ministries of Education and Skills Development and Local Government. The Ministry of Education and Skills Development is responsible for the recruitment, training, posting and payment of teachers and the facilitation of curriculum dissemination amongst others. It is also responsible for reviewing the curriculum periodically, whilst the Ministry of Local Government through the councils is responsible for: provision of infra-structure, purchase of all resources, transportation of pupils for educational purposes, registration of schools and the collection of school fees.

(d) Engineering Department

The major services provided by this department include but are not limited to:

(i)   Upkeep of city roads and upkeep of parks;

(ii) Provision and maintenance of streetlights and traffic lights;

(iii) Maintenance of offices and staff houses;

(iv) Sanitation services;

(v) Provision and maintenance of fire and emergency vehicles and cemetery facilities;

(vi) Approval of development/building planning permissions.

(e) Physical Planning Unit

The unit provides professional and technical advice to the council and its departments on all matters pertaining to land use and development planning. The unit is responsible for identifying suitable sites for all council projects and conducting detailed site planning for the sites. The unit is also responsible for preparing development plans and development control.

(f) Social and Community Development Department

The department has three sections, namely General Administration and Community Development, Home Economics and Social Welfare. It is mandated to enable individuals, families, groups and communities a positive functioning through relevant and constructive interventions, and link them with the relevant resources. It provides material, psychosocial and emotional support to its

clientele to cope with their circumstances and enhance a positive and meaningful life.

(g) Sewerage Services

The Sewerage Department comprises two main and distinct units, which are the Treatment Plant and the Township Services. The Treatment Plant is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the Sewerage Treatment Plant. The Township Service unit is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the infrastructure in Gaborone. It also ensures that new sewerage infrastructure and upgrading development, by both the private sector and Government departments, conforms to urban development standards and other requirements as well as the implementation of sewerage service cost recovery policies.

(h) Department of Architecture and Buildings

The department's mandate is to provide architectural and building services to all council departments including the design and execution of new council buildings, the processing of building permits and supervision of private developers, as well as the maintenance of council buildings.

The city council depends on central government for its funding; with capital projects being funded wholly while the recurrent budget is subsidized using the revenue support grant. The highest revenue source is through the rates paid by individual land owners, while other sources include sewerage, clinic fees, sanitation and plan perusal fees.

Statement of the problem

Records are a vital resource for every organization, for innovation and effective decision making. They are vital for development planning and for building an internationally competitive economy. People need records to participate in a democratic process and thus without records, the best development plans are likely to fail. Gaborone City Council as the nerve centre of the capital city of the republic of Botswana is mandated to plan, develop and implement projects that assist in the daily programmes and activities that help the city to function. As such the council creates and generates lots of records daily in order to achieve the goals and objectives that the council has set out to do. However, preliminary investigations at GCC revealed that there is no policy that guides the management of these records.

This was confirmed by the Principal Administration officer who indicated that records are not properly managed and the situation is worsened by the fact that since its establishment the council has never had officers designated specifically for the management of records, until recently when the council started recruiting records officers, and according to the officer the process is at infancy.

Records at GCC are scattered around offices and are not properly secured, which obviously puts the safety of the records at stake. Usually, fraud and corruption manifest themselves in fictitious records entries, alteration of records and concealment of facts. A case between GCC and Daisy Loo, a locally based company that was awarded a bush clearing tender of twenty-four million is one of the many examples that can be noted. Five GCC officials are on suspension pending the outcome of the case which has been dragging on for last three years. Another case that is yet to be heard is the one between GCC and UNISPEC Holdings Pty Ltd. It is alleged that the company was awarded a tender without the approval of the mayor who according to the tender regulations is supposed to sign all approved tenders. The tender had to be terminated after ten months and the company is now suing GCC. The above incidents are a pointer to the weak information management system at GCC. A study conducted by Wunsch (1998) revealed weak management of information systems in local governments in Botswana. This study therefore seeks to assess records management practices at GCC and to make recommendations for their future management.

Objectives of the study and research questions

The major objective of this study is to identify and assess the records management system of GCC and make recommendations for their future management. The study was guided by the following research questions:
1. Are officers aware of the importance of having a records management policy?
2. What type of records GCC generates and acquires?
3. How are records created, used, maintained and disposed of at GCC?
4. How are information and communication technologies used in the management of records at GCC?

5. How are records secured at GCC?

Literature review

Bertolucci (1996) in her study on the information audit as an important management tool argues that the information audit plays the same role as a financial audit since it offers a view of corporate operations. According to her, the audit answers questions related to: the kind of information existing in the organisation, location of this information, who the users are, how to maintain the information, and how much time/money is spent on information. She went further to suggest that information audit allows an expansive look at the nature of information in an organisation. She views an information audit as providing the analytical basis for controlling procedures and regulating costs.

Recent authors of information audit methodologies, most notably Henczel (2001), Orna (1999), and Wood (2004), provide more or less similar definitions. Elaborating on the definition above, Buchanan and Gibb (1998) proposed that in its simplest form, the objectives of the information audit could be limited to: (i) identifying an organization's information resources; and (ii) identifying an organization's information needs. However, when applied to its full potential, the objectives of the information audit could also include one or more of the following:
(a) identifying costs and benefits of information resources;

(b) identifying opportunities to use information resources for strategic competitive advantage;

(c) integrating information technology investments with strategic business initiatives;

(d) identifying information flows and processes;

(e) developing an integrated information strategy and/or policy;

(f) creating awareness of the importance of information management and defining the management role; and

(g) monitoring and evaluating conformance with information-related standards, legislation, and policy guidelines.

Buchanan and Gibb (1998) proposed that information audits can be used to identify costs and benefits of information resources, identify opportunities to use information resources for strategic competitive advantage, integrate information technology investments with strategic business initiatives and monitor and evaluate conformance with information-related standards, legislation, and policy guidelines. Haynes (1995: 30) states that "the overall purpose of an information audit is to improve the performance of the organization." The results presented, clearly demonstrate the need for GCC to conduct a review of the roles of its records management personnel to ensure that it remains committed to its core business of managing records. Buchanan and Gibb (1998: 33) define an information audit as "an analysis of the communications (processes and information) that take place between agents (people) in a social context (the organization) using a variety of media and channels (technology)." As a starting point, this study sought to audit the records management system at GCC and come up with recommendations for improvement. ISO 15489-1 (2001: 17) states that:

> compliance monitoring should be regularly undertaken to ensure that the records system procedures and processes are being implemented according to the organizational policies and require-ments and meet the anticipated outcomes. The regulatory envi-ronment may require that external bodies undertake monitoring and auditing. Modifications to the records systems and records management processes should be made if these are found to be unsuitable or ineffective.

Currently, there is no universally accepted definition for an information audit and this also applies to the model used to conduct information audits because of the varied structures, natures and circumstances in which these audits are carried out. The following information auditing techniques have been identified by different authors:
1. Information Auditing Process (Orna: 1999)
2. Geographical Approach (Gillman: 1985)
3. Hybrid Approach (Quinn: 1979)
4. Info Map (Burk and Horton: 1988)
5. Cost-Benefit Methodologies (Riley: 1976), (Henderson: 1980)
6. The Seven-Stage Model (Henczel: 2001)
7. The Five Stage Model (Buchanan and Gibb: 1998)
8. ISO 15489 As An Audit Tool (Crockett and Foster: 2004)

9. DIRKS: A Strategic Approach to Managing Business Information (2001)
10. Records and Information Management Program Audit (RIM) (Anderson: 2009)

An information audit is a management tool which helps an organization to begin to understand how its information assets are being put to use and how these can be more effectively harnessed to achieve optimum productivity and strategic advantage. Botha and Boon (2003: 24) state that an information audit entails the systematic examination of the information resources, information use, information flows and the management of these in an organization. They further state that it involves the identification of users' information needs and how effectively (or not) these are being met. In addition to this, the (monetary) cost and the value of the information resources to the organization are calculated and determined. This is done with a view to determining whether the organizational information environment contributes to the attainment of the organizational objectives and furthermore, to the establishment and implementation of effective information management principles and procedures. An information audit answers questions related to: the kind of information existing in the organization, location of this information, who the users are, how to maintain the information, and how much time/money is spent on information. The maintenance aspect of Bertolucci's position is what is relevant here. In other words, maintenance is a very important issue as far as an information audit of an organization is concerned.

Available literature on the information audit indicates that few countries in Africa have conducted information audits. Botha and Boon (2003) developed a paper that addresses the principles and guidelines of the information audit within the South African context. In their study, they discussed various information-based types of audits; the communication audit, information mapping, the information system audit, the knowledge audit, and the intelligence audit, which according to their findings none of the audits can be regarded as the same as information audit. They have developed several guidelines that look into areas to cover when conducting an information audit.

The guidelines cover some of the following:

Level 1: Personal Information Management

(a) Use of information: one of the results of an information audit is knowledge of available information sources and where these are, i.e. an information inventory. This can enhance the use of information.

(b) Archiving information and disposing of information: the information inventory is analyzed in terms of the usefulness of the information sources and according to this information, decisions regarding archiving and/or disposing can be made.

(c) Marketing of information: an information audit is an effective marketing tool.

Level 2: Operational information management

(a) Identification of information needs: a very important component of the information audit is an information needs assessment.

(b) Relevant information is identified: during the information audit, identified information sources are evaluated in terms of their value.

Level 3: Organizational information management

(a) Development and provision of an information technology infrastructure: an examination of information technology tools.

(b) The coordination and implementation of an organizational information policy: this can be one of the outcomes of information audit.

(c) Information education: the information audit can be used as a sensitizing tool.

(d) The planning, development and continuous evaluation of information systems: the information audit should be repeated at regular intervals for the purpose of evaluating information systems and sources.

Level 4: Corporate, strategic information management

(a) The formulation of an organizational information policy.

(b) The management of financial, physical and human resources in order to provide information systems.

(c) The identification of strategic information needs.

In their final analysis Botha and Boon (2003) indicate that an information audit can contribute significantly to effective information management. This is because it provides detailed and accurate information on the organizational information environment.

In Botswana, a study on the information audit was conducted at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat head-quarters in Gaborone. The study used a case study method and the researchers combined three methods of data collection, namely questionnaires, structured interviews and personal observations. The purpose of the study was to identify the information needs, informa-tion flows and processes and information resources within the SADC Secretariat. The study aimed at assisting the Secretariat to improve the management of information in the organization. The study anticipated contributing to the management of information through the identification of information resources, information needs and infor-mation flows and processes. The findings of the study were that the Secretariat needed to work on improving the quality of their informa-tion systems. This was due to the fact that the information services available were not fully utilized and were not matching up to the standards of the officers' daily requirements. The major findings of the study were that the Secretariat had no information policy to guide the management of information at the SADC Secretariat (Tali and Mnjama 2004).

Methodology

The population of this study included a total of 35 employees of GCC comprising the Mayor, the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk, eleven heads of departments/units within headquarters, one Informa-tion Technology officer and 20 Records officers in all departments that fall under GCC. These were selected on the basis of their duties in the organisation which include but are not limited to: planning, policy formulation, monitoring, ownership implementation and mainte-nance of the organisation programmes such as records management. A purposive sampling technique was employed and the study targeted senior officers, IT officers and records officers. The popula-tion was drawn from six departments namely: Environmental Health, Engineering, Sewerage Services, Fire Services, By Law and Building Control Department. The officers selected are involved in the formula-tion and implementation of policies. It also targeted RMU staff who work directly with the clients who consults records in the RMUs.

The study used a combination of open ended and closed ended types of questionnaires. The questionnaires were accompanied by a letter

of introduction and they were delivered personally to the respondents and collected two weeks after distribution. The first questionnaire was used to collect data from records users. The second questionnaire was used to collect data from records officers. The third questionnaire was used to collect data from the Information Technology officer. Structured interviews were held with action officers to solicit data on the management of records at GCC. Structured interviews were also held with records officers to gather data relating to the management of records. The researchers made separate appointments after both the questionnaires and observations had been administered to conduct interviews, and the sessions were allocated one hour as the minimum time that could be used to interview respondents. The reason for conducting interviews with records officers was to supplement gaps in the data collected through questionnaires. This study used the non-participatory obtrusive observation. The researchers had the opportunity to inspect files, incoming mail registers, outgoing mail registers, retrieval tools and general behaviour of officers in the registries. The reasons for choosing this method is that it gives the researchers the opportunity to experience the system used and it eliminates bias from respondents. The method also validates the facts obtained from the questionnaires.

Findings and discussions

The population of the study consisted of 35 respondents. Questionnaires were distributed among records users (officers who use records to conduct daily operations), records officers and IT officers. Twenty questionnaires were completed and returned indicating a response rate of 57%. The distribution of the respondents and the response rate is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents	Question-naires distributed	Returned question-naires	Question-naires not returned	Response rate (%)
Records Users	14	7	5	50
Records/Administrative Officers	20	12	8	60
IT Officers	1	1	N/A	100
Totals	35	20	13	57

Table 1 shows the general response rate from the three major categories. The table indicates that half of the records users responded to the questionnaire. The researchers attribute the low return rate to the fact that most respondents had limited time to respond to the items. This made most of them retain the questionnaires in their custody for up to a month before returning them to the researchers. Moreover, most of the open ended questions were not responded to. Only the closed ended ones were properly completed. The majority of the respondents were not trained in records management and most of them were not well conversant with records management princeples and context and therefore were unable to complete the questionnaires. The researchers had initially planned to interview six senior management officers comprising the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and Chief Officers. However, this proved difficult because of their busy schedules. Only two officers from the senior management team were interviewed giving a response rate of 33.3% for this category. These interviews were successful and proved to be more fruitful since they provided a unique opportunity for discussing policy issues with members of senior management at the Council. Only one IT officer was targeted because the organization has only two IT officers serving the headquarters and all the other departments around the city. Despite the limitations experienced during data collection, the data collected portrays a true picture of records management at GCC.

Information audits at GCC
This study therefore sought to determine if GCC had ever conducted any information audit. The finding of the study indicates that GCC has never conducted any information audit and that this was the first type

of information audit ever to be carried out in the organization. This partially explains why the organization is lacking in terms of programmes on   basic records management requirements such as policies, a records management programme, as well as recruiting records management professionals.

Records policies and awareness
ISO 15489-1 (2001: 5) states that:

> organizations should define and document a policy for records management. The objective of the policy should be the creation and management of authentic, reliable and useable records, capable of supporting business functions and activities for as long as they are required. Organizations should ensure that the policy is communicated and implemented at all levels in the organization.

For this reason, this study sought to find out whether GCC has a records management policy for the organization. The findings of the study revealed that the organization lacks a records management policy. When asked further if they were aware of the importance of having such a policy, 5 (71.4%) of the respondents indicated that they are aware of the importance of having a records management policy in the organization. However 2 (28.6%) of the respondents were ignorant of the importance of having the policy. On the issue of incorporation of records management in the strategic plan, 5 (71.4%) indicated that the organization does not include records management in its strategic plans. Also the data shows that there are no written standards by which performance in the management of records is measured within the organization.

Based on the above findings, this study recommends that GCC develops a records management policy as it will provide authority for the development and implementation of a records management programme that will ensure the creation and maintenance of authentic, reliable, complete and useable records, capable of supporting business functions and activities for as long as they are needed.

Records management units (current records management set-up at GCC)

GCC has a central records management unit situated at the headquarters and the unit is managed by five records officers. The Records Management Unit is divided into Personnel registry (which houses junior staff files) and open registry (houses non sensitive policy files). The office of the Town Clerk keeps and manages confidential records (top management personal files and highly sensitive policy files). These records comprise senior management personal files, all permanent and pensionable officers' confidential files and classified records for all departments. The Executive Secretary is responsible for the management of these files but she lacks records management training. Within the organizational structure, records management activities falls under the Department of Human Resource and Administration. The officer in charge of records management oversees other functions such as human resource, information technology and administration division. The study revealed that even though records management is at par with the above mentioned functions, the officer in charge of records is below all these officers in terms of designation.

The question of whether records management staff is consulted when new systems are purchased or developed did not come up clearly and this was due to the fact that there seems to be general lack of awareness of the importance of including records management in the overall plans of the Council despite the fact that respondents did indicate that they use the records management unit several times a week. The main registry services all departments at GCC most of which are located outside the headquarters. The five records officers who have been trained in records management only manage records at the headquarters, while the mini registries that are found in the various departments are managed by administrative officers who do not have any qualifications in records management.

Moreover, personal observations revealed that the registries are not well equipped. Mobile shelves are only available in the main registry and the Town Clerk's office. Metal cabinets are used for storing records in the mini-registries around departments and in individual offices. Some records that were found in individual offices were piled on the floor and on top of steel cabinets. ISO 15489-1 (2001:9) states

that "appropriate storage environment and media, physical protective materials, handling procedures and storage systems should be considered when designing the records system."

Mail Management

Records Management exists to ensure that both incoming and outgoing mail is processed in the fastest, most secure and cost effective means. For this reason this study sought to determine whether mail management meets the above criteria. The findings of the study indicate that mail is collected from the post office twice daily, in the morning and in the afternoon. It is opened by the Records Management Unit staff, registered in the Incoming Mail Register and then placed in a mail circulation box. Each senior officer listed in the mail circulation box is expected to browse through the incoming mail circulation within five minutes. Due to this process delays are often experienced as it often takes up to one day for the mail circulation box to return to the Records Management Unit. Based on the above finding, it is suggested that the number of officers entitled to view the mail circulation box be reduced or where it is considered necessary for more than one officer to have knowledge of incoming correspond-dence surrogate copies from the original be made available to them while the original correspondence is forwarded to the appropriate action officer

Records creation

ISO 15489-1(2001:11) states that "determining which documents should be captured into a records system is based on an analysis of the regulatory environment, business and accountability requirements and the risk of not capturing the records." Based on this under-standing, this study sought to find the types of records created by GCC. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate if GCC had a policy document stating the type of records to be captured into GCC record keeping system. The results indicate that 10 (83.3%) of the respondents said that their organization or office does not have any document stating which records should be created or captured, whereas 2 (16.6%) indicated that their organization did have such a document. This result put very simply means that the organization does not have any document showing or indicating the type of document officials should create or capture.

Respondents were further asked to indicate the types of records they create in their organization. The results to this question are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Types of Record Created by GCC

S/N	Types of Records Created	Yes	No
1.	Report	10 (83.3%)	2 (16.7%)
2.	General Mail	4 (33.3%)	8 (66.7%)
3.	Legal Information	5 (41.7%)	7 (58.3%)
4.	Reviews	5 (41.7%)	7 (58.3%)
5.	Minutes	4 (33.3%)	8 (66.7%)

Table 2 above reveals that 10 (83.3%) of the respondents identified reports as the most common record created by the organization. Next to this is legal information and reviews while general mail and minutes follow. The majority indicated that they did not create any other mail except reports. Personal observations revealed that the Council creates specialized records like tender documents for various projects and the city's geographical maps. The respondents could not state clearly that they have specialized reports in terms of size. This may be due to their lack of awareness that their organization does create other records apart from reports.

Moreover, the study revealed that the types of records created vary from department to department. The Building Control Division for instance keeps and manages clients' building plans, and sewerage lines records. The storage of these plans is done in a haphazard manner and the plans are kept in open shelves which put the plans at risk of being stolen or lost. The Department of Social and Community Development keeps records in the form of business licences, ranging from specialized dealers, bottle stores, wholesalers, hawkers and street vendors. The Department of Engineering and Building Services keeps infrastructural contractual files of various contractors. The Law Department which deals with among other issues, illegal business operators, land structures and outsourced security services keeps records relating to the above mentioned services. The Environmental Health Department offers health services to the public and keeps operational records relating to the services offered. Finally the Education Department maintains records relating to: training, recruitment

and posting of primary school teachers, teachers' salaries and school registration records.

When asked to state the challenges experienced by GCC in the area of records creation, 9 (75%) of the respondents indicated that they faced one challenge or the other in the process of records creation, while 2 (25%) of the respondents suggested that the organization does not face any challenges in records creation. It should be noted that it is only those who are directly involved in records creation that know the types of challenges they face. The 2 (25%) who indicated that their organization does not experience any challenges in the process of records creation were in the category of records/ administrative officers and this category includes officers whose core responsibilities are not records management related. Various issues have been cited as contributing directly or indirectly to poor records creation. Seventy-five percent was attributed to poor arrangement of records while 12 (42%) was due to loss of records and time management. A lack of qualified personnel was cited by 12 (33.3%).

Organization of records
Another aspect this study sought to investigate is the maintenance of records. For this reason, respondents were asked to indicate how records are maintained in their various offices. The findings revealed that their office maintains a register or index of records held within their Records Management Unit. In terms of physical arrangement, 8 (66.6%) respondents indicated that their records are not arranged in any logical manner. Some of the records in the main registry are arranged alpha-numerically while others were arranged numerically. The reasons given for using two systems of arranging records was that the old and the new methods were used simultaneously and an index was used to retrieve records. In the confidential registry records are arranged numerically and an index has been developed for the records. Discussions with the records officers revealed that currently GCC is in the process of developing a comprehensive file classification system.

Based on the observations discussed above, this study recommends the development of a standardized functional based classification scheme for all departments. The classification will assist in grouping, naming and arranging related records together thereby resulting in

efficient retrieval and identification of records. The classification system should be developed by the senior records manager working in consultation with the representatives from different Council departments.

File management
Regular loss and misplacement of records may partially be due to ineffective tools to monitor the movement of files within the organization. The results of this study indicate that the most common methods used to track file movement in the organization are the file movement card 6 (50%) and book 6 (50%). The findings further revealed that many of the officers do not monitor the movement of files from their offices and as a result some records have been lost while under their custody.

On the other hand, 3 (25%) cited memory as a substitute method for keeping track of file movements. This is not considered a good method or practice to use, and cannot be recommended for tracking records. When respondents were asked to indicate what happens when records cannot be located, the results indicated that the majority 6 (50%) prefer the creation of new ones while 4 (33.3%) preferred the opening of temporary files. Others 1 (8.3%) refer the matter to their supervisor and a similar percentage request clients to supply them with the requested information. A major weakness of opening temporary files was that these temporary files were rarely merged with the original files when they were eventually found.

It was further observed that the Records Management Unit does not normally conduct a file census to establish the location of files that might have left the Unit unrecorded or which have been passed from one action officer to another without notifying the Unit. Moreover the study established that some action officers do not complete the action ladder to signify that they had completed the actions on the files that had been marked to them. It was also observed that some officers scribble on the correspondence instead of using minute sheets, thus destroying the authenticity of the correspondence. Finally, the study also noted that there were challenges encountered in filling publications and large reports, resulting in some of the documents losing their link with the original files.

Access to records
ISO 15489-1(2001:10) states that "records systems should include and apply controls on access to ensure that the integrity of the records is not compromised. They should provide and maintain audit trails or other methods to demonstrate that records were effectively protected from unauthorized use, alteration or destruction." For this reason, this study sought to determine who may have access to GCC records. Personal observations revealed that there are no guidelines on records access and that it was the responsibility of respective departments to prevent unauthorized access to the records under their custody. Moreover the findings revealed that retrieval time for records ranged from "a few minutes" to "sometimes" or "ever for older records". This study recommends the development of a standardized file movement card which will be used by all the users in departments. The file movement card should be completed each time the file leaves its usual storage location, and at a minimum should contain information on the date of issue, to whom issued and date of return. The card will assist in documenting accurate and up to date information of the location of all records resulting in effective identification of records when they are needed.

Records storage
Records require storage conditions and handling processes that take into account their specific physical and chemical properties. On the whole the findings of the study indicate that Gaborone City Council Records Management Unit is too small for the volume of records it is expected to handle. For this reason, the store rooms were congested. Although the Council has installed a mobile shelving Unit in the Records Management Unit, this has led to congestion in the office. It was also observed that the records storage areas had accumulated a lot of dust and were not cleaned regularly.

The records in the main registry are exposed to electric lamps which are situated directly above the records. Most offices housing the records had air conditioners but the store rooms which housed semi-current records lacked air conditioners. Moreover, the air conditioners were not regularly used and they were switched off during the night. There are no humidifiers or dehumidifiers and no special environmental conditions for records. It cannot be overstated that a fluctuation in relative humidity and in temperatures is likely to lead to the

deterioration of the records. The offices surveyed had fire extinguishers but the officers have not been trained in the use of these facilities, which may lead to the deterioration of records in the event of accidental fire. Based on these findings, this study recommends that GCC identifies a suitable location which will house its Records Management Unit and provide adequate storage space for its current and non-current records.

Retention and disposal of records
A records retention and disposal schedule is a document that prescribes the length of time for keeping records and disposal actions in line with legislative and business requirements. ISO 15489-1 (2001:10) stipulates that "records systems should be capable of facilitating and implementing decisions on the retention or disposition of records. It should be possible for these decisions to be made at any time in the existence of records, including during the design stage of records systems. It should also be possible, where appropriate, for disposition to be activated automatically. Systems should provide audit trails or other methods to track completed disposition actions." This study therefore sought to establish the existence of retention/ disposition schedules at GCC. The findings revealed that presently there are no retention and disposition schedules at GCC. Although in the past some records have been transferred to Botswana National Archives and Records Services, it was not clear how the officers reached the decision to transfer records to BNARS. Moreover, it was not possible during the data gathering stage to obtain details on the quantity, date range, types and formats of records transferred. In the absence of retention and disposal schedules at GCC, it is possible that some of the records deposited at BNARS could be of ephemeral nature. When the researchers sought clarification from BNARS, it was confirmed that some records belonging to GCC have been transferred to BNARS. It was however not possible during data collection to determine the actual volume, nature and the date range of records that had been transferred to BNARS.

Based on these findings, this study recommends that GCC formulates and implements a records retention and disposition schedule, which will ensure the systematic disposition of records no longer needed to support current GCC business, while at the same time ensuring that GCC legacy records are preserved. Considering the

amount of records GCC produces, it is advisable that they secure space to use as a records centre as this will be cost effective and time saving. Section 2 of the BNARS Act stipulates that "if it appears to the minister that facilities exist for the safekeeping and preservation of public records and their inspection by the public in some place other than the National Archives and that convenience so requires, he may, with the agreement of the authority or person responsible for that place, declare that place to be a place of deposit for public records of any category." Specifically the proposed GCC archive centre should:

   (i)   Provide information services and finding aids that will assist in the retrieval of information from the archives.
   (ii)   Establish procedures and guidelines for the systematic collection and disposal of Council records.
   (iii)   Make available and encourage the use of the collection by the Council staff and the general public.
   (iv)   Facilitate efficient records management.

Records preservation
The study sought to assess the methods needed to preserve and store records at GCC and also to determine if there are procedures set to ensure the smooth transition of records from one stage to another. The study revealed that none of the records officers have any basic training in records preservation and conservation. There is no policy on records conservation and preservation. The study further revealed that GCC does not have a preservation programme and issues of torn files are handled in a haphazard manner because of lack of training and knowledge of how to deal with preservation issues. For instance, when a file is torn what is simply done is to replace it with a new one. The study further revealed that there is no system in place for dealing with pest infestation. Instead one records officer confirmed that they had once engaged the services of the Environmental Health Department after suspicion that there were pests in the registry. In general the issue of preservation is lacking in many material respects. Personal observation revealed that most paper records in the store rooms were not properly stored. It was also observed that semi-current records and non-current records are stored in the same area, contrary to the ISO 15489-1 (2001:14) recommendation that:

records should be stored on media that ensure their usability, reliability, authenticity and preservation for as long as their needed. Records of continuing value, irrespective of format, require higher quality storage and handling to preserve them for as long as that value exists.

The store rooms themselves are not well maintained and lack suitable physical and environmental conditions. In some departments current and non-current records are squeezed together in filing cabinets which results in some getting torn. The storage equipment used for most records at GCC is not the approved mobile cabinets. Records are stored in old metal shelves which are rusty and not lockable which compromises the security of the records. The transition of the records from one stage to the other is not smooth since there are no written guidelines and records officers more often use their discretion to promote a record to the next stage.

Information flow in the organization
This study sought to assess the flow of information in the organization particularly within the headquarters and departments situated outside the organization and with external entities. GCC has a central records management unit which serves divisions within the headquarters and departments around the city. The office is manned by five officers and it has been divided into an open and confidential registry. The confidential registry stores personnel records and the open registry stores general records generated at GCC. The main registry is not utilized as it should be as some officers receive correspondences directly from clients and keep the documents in their offices, thereby resulting in poor information flow and lack of sharing. Individual officers create records and send them to various external entities. This has led to GCC losing control of information created as these officers do not keep incoming and outgoing mail registers. The practice has also resulted in GCC not having a clear and consistent flow of information within and outside the organization. When mail is received or created at the main registry, copies are made and sent by hand or faxed to various departments. In the event information received is specifically addressed to a particular department the correspondence is registered and passed to the relevant officer in a given department. The records officers at the main registry ensure that general information such as savingrams, internal and annual reports, legal information relating to a particular division reports, invitations to meetings etc is

passed on to other departments. The study has revealed that the practice is not reliable and consistent as there are often delays and at times loss of valuable correspondence. Officers who receive these correspondences have not been trained in records management and have other duties to perform other than records management, therefore basic records management processes are not adhered to which compromises the integrity of records received by these officers.

Security and disaster preparedness
Records must be protected physically and intellectually throughout their lifecycle to ensure that they survive for as long as they are needed to serve their purpose as evidence and information of past and present activities. It is the responsibility of organisations to ensure that security and disaster plans are formulated and implemented to safeguard records in their custody. The majority of the respondents 9 (75%) were of the opinion that the organization does not place much emphasis on the security of its records but tries to secure confidential records which are housed and managed by the secretary in the Town Clerk's office. On the other hand, 3 (25%) of the respondents were of the opinion that their organization does provide security for its records. Personal observations revealed that there are no guidelines on records security. The respondents were asked to indicate if the facilities provide a secure environment for records. Seventy-five percent of the respondents indicated that their organization does not provide security for the records while 11 (91.7%) indicated that the store rooms are not always locked. Inspection of the storage areas showed that windows in the records stores had no burglar bars and the doors had ordinary locks which could easily be tampered with.

A disaster preparedness plan is an important tool central to the protection and preservation of records. Hlabangaan (2006:3) states that "disaster and security planning should be incorporated into the overall management plans of organizations. Without disaster plans, organizations would not have any systematic way of dealing with the disasters and their staff would not be adequately trained in emergency procedures hence they would also be in danger of getting hurt." Respondents were therefore asked to state whether they had a disaster preparedness plan in place. The results show that 8 (66.7%)

of the respondents were of the view that GCC does not have any disaster plan.

On the other hand, 4 (33.3%) indicated that they do. The variations in these responses may be attributed to lack of awareness of what constitutes a disaster preparedness plans. On whether or not there has been a major incidence of disaster occurring in the past, 3 (25%) indicated Yes, and when probed further respondents indicated that the records were once soaked in water and they just put the records outside for drying as against 9 (75%) who indicated No for the question. This therefore means that GCC has never had incidents of major disasters in the past. Moreover, it was also interesting to note that 10 (83.3%) of the respondents indicated that officers are not trained for any emergency procedures.

Based on the above findings, this study recommends that GCC develops a records security policy with comprehensive guidelines that will include both physical and intellectual security mechanisms and control for the records. The physical security controls must take the following into consideration:-

    (i)   Control of movement into records storage areas through installation of service counters.
    (ii)   Proper storage facilities (high density, lockable, water proof).
    (iii) Protection of records against fire by having smoke and fire detectors.
    (iv) Ensuring that records are kept under conducive environment conditions.

Use of ICTs in records management
One of the objectives of this study was to determine the extent to which GCC is utilizing ICTs like computers in the management of their records. To answer this research question, a questionnaire was distributed to one IT officer and an interview held separately with another officer. The results of the questionnaire and the interview conducted showed that a policy on management of electronic records does not exist. The results revealed that although ICTs are being used at GCC there is no linkage with the Records Management Unit. Basically, respondents use computers for e-mail and typing of documents and sending of correspondences. But, whatever information is sent or received via email remains with individuals who are at liberty

to delete or save the emails in their personal computers. These findings demonstrate a lack of awareness that e-mail constitutes official records and that e-mail that is generated during the course of business is not being captured in the official records system.

Furthermore, part of the questions asked during the interview exercise sought to determine (i) whether electronic record keeping is used at GCC, (ii) how long have e-records been generated, and (iii) when the organization started capturing e-records into its records management systems. The results to all these questions revealed the misconception that electronic recordkeeping is not being practiced at GCC. The misconception that electronic records are not being generated resulted in respondents not attending to the issue of how long e-records have been generated at GCC. Likewise, the time the organization started to capture e-records into its records management systems was also identified as not relevant because the assumption is that GCC is not practicing electronic recordkeeping. Furthermore, some of the senior officers interviewed explained that their office is playing a role in the management of paper records and not electronic since the organization is not yet practicing electronic recordkeeping. From the above responses, it was obvious that GCC employees do not view emails and records generated from the use of computers as forming part of official records. On whether the senior officers were working with the Records Management Unit in improving the capture of electronic records, it was revealed that the senior management officers are only working with the Records Management Unit in the area of improving records management generally at GCC and not improving the capture of electronic records.

Furthermore, the results revealed that as of now there is no written policy on the use of e-mail in the transaction of official business. The only thing in existence for now is the fact that there are provisions for officers in the organization to use e-mail for private or official correspondence and such correspondence remains with the individual officer. Similarly, it was evident that the organization does not have any programme on e-records, and there is no retention schedule on e-records either. There is no system that ensures e-mail records are saved from destruction before being captured in the records management system. However, the results revealed that daily backups are conducted at GCC by the IT personnel. The results also revealed that

currently there is no mechanism in place to ensure long term preservation and access to the e-records and also there is no system in place to ensure that official email is not destroyed. All is due to the fact that GCC management and staff are operating under the understanding that GCC has not embraced electronic recordkeeping as yet, while the truth of the matter is for as long as email is used as a communication tool, records are being generated.

Based on the above findings, this study recommends that GCC develops and implements an e-records management programme to guide in the creation, use, maintenance and disposal of e-records. Cain and Millar (2004), note that computerized systems offer significant advantages over conventional methods in that they can manipulate large amounts of information and offer speed, precision, diversity and flexibility. The study further recommends that GCC equips both records management personnel and officers with adequate training in IT to enable them to develop an effective integrated e-records management system. The International Labour Organization ILO (1998) notes that changes in technology often imply that new skills are needed because even if the equipment is made available, insufficient staff training can hamper its effectiveness. IT officers have to provide consistent advice on ensuring that information created in computers remains accessible at all times. Finally, this study further recommends that GCC develops and implements an e-records retention and disposal schedule to ensure systematic disposition of e-records. It is also recommended that GCC develops an institutional repository for e-records to be managed by well qualified IT personnel with a view to retaining GCC-born digital records.

Records management personnel
Mnjama (1996) argues that the effective management of a records programme must be supported by a team of well qualified records managers. ISO 15489-1:2001 recommends that organizations should establish an ongoing programme of records training. This study, therefore, sought to establish if records officers at GCC have had proper training in records management. The study revealed that only 5 (41.7%) of the respondents have had formal training in records management while the rest of the officers who manage records have no formal training. Most of the officers were secretaries, administrative assistants or financial officers.

As indicated above the poor state of recordkeeping at the GCC may be attributed to the lack of trained personnel in records management and that it is only recently that the organization has approved an organization and methods review which recommended the recruitment of professionals in records management, a process which is still ongoing.

Based on the findings, this study recommends the recruitment of more qualified records management professionals who will be responsible for coordinating the development, monitoring and reviewing of the records management systems and procedures for GCC under the guidance of BNARS. This will enable GCC to design and implement a system that will capture and maintain records in accordance with business needs, legal requirements and records management standards. GCC must develop an ongoing communication programme on records management to maintain awareness and knowledge.

GCC Records Management Committee
The causes of poor recordkeeping may be traced to the absence of a Records Management Committee in the Council. The findings of the study showed that some time in 2002, a Records Management Committee was constituted but the Committee has remained inactive since then. This study recommends that GCC reconstitutes a Records Management Committee comprising heads of departments and senior records officers. The proposed Committee should be responsible for:
   (i) Approving manuals and other publications prepared by the Records Management Unit;
   (ii) Approving a records retention/disposal schedule;
   (iii) Developing a functional based classification scheme;
   (iv) Ensuring that suitable equipment is available for records; and
   (v) Developing regulations governing access to GCC records by members of the public.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that in the past GCC has not undertaken any records management audits. The findings of this study

suggest the need to conduct regular records management audits if GCC is to benefit fully from its records management programme. Moreover, with the ever changing ICT technologies which are now driving information management initiatives, there is a need for GCC to benchmark its records management programme with other well established records management programmes for local councils in the region or in the West. This can possibly be done through links, staff exchange programmes or other methods which allow for the exchange of ideas and knowledge between GCC records personnel and professionals elsewhere.

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