E-RECORD READINESS – CAN WE BUILD A CONTEXTUAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR LABOUR ORGANISATIONS IN BOTSWANA?

Trywell Kalusopa
Department of Library and Information Studies,
University of Botswana
E-mail: Kalusopat@mopipi.ub.bw

Abstract

Literature shows that by and large, most labour organisations' activities are largely knowledge-based as well as information intensive and that the proliferation of e-records has brought about many challenges to labour organizations, many of which are unaware of the numerous issues pertaining to the creation, storage and retrieval and dissemination of e-records. Currently there are various assessment tools that have been put in place to assess the depth of e-readiness all over the world. However, most of these tools have been criticized for "varying definitions for e-readiness and different methods for measurement while others have been criticized for lacking the "information access" component but "subsumed under information and communication technology (ICT)". In particular, most of these tools are said to be general in nature and that they are highly quantitative in measurement, focus on government agencies and do not emphasize the question of e-record readiness in the civil society or non-governmental organizations. The question, therefore, that needs to be addressed is whether the existing e-records readiness framework is appropriate for assessing e-records readiness in labour organizations and to what extent such a framework can be used as basis for understanding the management of electronic records in such organizations. This article therefore interrogates the usefulness of e-records readiness assessment tools in labour organizations in Botswana. Based on a literature review, the article seeks to review

the content, context and implementation of e-records readiness tools in labour organisations in Botswana. The article concludes by calling for the development of a framework that "institutionalises knowledge about the e-records readiness process-es" in labour organizations for them to integrate fully in the envisaged e-environment in Botswana.

Keywords: E-records, E-readiness, E-record readiness, E-government, Botswana

Introduction

This article reviews literature on the usefulness of existing e-records readiness assessment tools and presents a theoretical and conceptual review of related literature on e-readiness and e-records readiness in labour organizations in Botswana. In particular, literature regarding the depth of information communication technologies (ICTs) in selected labour organization environments is presented. It is important to note that there is a dearth of information on e-readiness and e-records readiness in labour organizations in Africa and in this regard and extent, the selected literature review for this article has to a larger degree been drawn from studies that have been carried out in the western world.

The purpose of this literature review was to establish the context and conceptual framework of e-readiness and e-records readiness assessment models in labour organisations. This is because understanding the e-readiness and e-records readiness assessment models will be the basis for first, establishing the general picture and extent in terms of benefits to and challenges of labour organizations in an e-environment but also provides a framework for the development of a methodology in assessing the depth of the e-records readiness in the labour organizations in Botswana.

The above situation is exemplified by the consensus among most researchers and scholars who agree that a literature review assists in "identifying theories and ideas that are tested using data… [and for] developing a theoretical or conceptual framework" (Ngulube 2009: 28). This is irrespective of whether the end result of this testing of data is a deductive or inductive model.

For the purpose of this article, the sources of information for the relevant literature reviewed were collected in documentary and electronic form and cover broader and specific issues relating to e-readiness, e-records readiness, the impact of ICT in labour organizations in developed as well as developing countries, more particularly their impact on the development of a sector-specific framework in Botswana.

Definition and scope of e-readiness and e-records readiness assessment tools

During the past decade, information management and recordkeeping practices in most organizations have been revolutionized. More so, the advent of ICTs has transformed the way many organizations create, store, disseminate, and use information. The management of e-records and information has now gained significant thrust in national development all over the world (Keakopa 2006).

By definition and scope, e-readiness and e-records readiness are related and highly complementary. Bearman and Trant (1997:5) define e-records as:

> evidence of transactions (relationships of acts), means of actions and information about acts such as electronically produced meeting minutes, e-mails and so on ... e-records comprise content, context and structure and are the recorded information, documents or data that provide evidence of policies, transactions and activities carried out in e-environments.

Choucri *et al.,* (2003) posits that e-readiness is a relatively new concept that has been given impetus due to the dramatic advances in uses of information communication technologies and more particularly the rapid rate of Internet penetration throughout the world in business and industry. E-readiness thus refers to a society that has the necessary physical infrastructure and a strong legal, policy and regulatory framework to competitively engage in the global information age (Bridges.org. 2001). The concept of e-readiness originated as a result of an attempt to provide a unified framework to evaluate the breadth and depth of the digital divide between the developed and developing world during the later part of the 1990s (Wamukoya and Mutula 2005). As put by Little and Bose (2004), e-readiness "is the

degree to which a country is prepared to participate in the networked world by assessing its advancement in areas that are most critical to the adoption of ICTs". E-records readiness, on the other hand, is the ability to have e-records management systems that ensure that e-records, like counterpart traditional paper records, conform to the necessary generic recordkeeping best practice so that they are protected for posterity as reliable evidence (IRMT 2004).

Contextual setting of the inquiry: why labour organisations?

Labour organizations comprise unions of workers who have come together to achieve common goals in key areas such as wages, hours, and working conditions. Labour organizations are constituency-based in that through their elected leadership, they bargain with the employer on behalf of union members (commonly referred to as rank and file members) and negotiate labour contracts with employers (Rainsberger 1998). This may include the negotiation of wages, work rules, complaint procedures, rules governing hiring, firing and promotion of workers, benefits, workplace safety and policies. The agreements negotiated by the union leaders are binding on the rank and file members and the employer and in some cases on other non-member workers. Labour organizations may comprise individual workers, professionals, past workers, or the unemployed (Rainsberger 1998).

Many labour organizations exist for historical and ideological reasons of advancing the cause of workers. They engage the working social and economic order and may either accept the existing economic order and work within that order to achieve a "favourable set of economic terms and employment conditions, or they may seek to overthrow the existing economic system and replace it with another". The former strategy has been called "business unionism" or "simple unionism" while the other strategy tends to go beyond workplace issues to deal with broader socio-economic matters that affect the workers and the people, a strategy called "social trade unionism" (Rainsberger 1998; ICFTU 2001; Wood 2001).

Thus most labour organizations are not as highly formalized as government, have different information seeking patterns and the values of democratization and advocacy are their main domain

(Kalusopa 2008). In this context, one could argue that there is on-going debate as to whether concepts derived from the government and business world such as e-record readiness, that have been studied and adopted in government and business environments can readily be applied to labour organizations. This is so because it is often argued that conventional public organizations are funded differently, have different objectives, and operate in different environments. However, given their influence and active responses in socio-economic governance, there is now a growing interest in how labour organizations can actively build their capacity in using information in an e-environment in advancing their objectives. It is in this context that the article explores the usefulness of e-records readiness assessment tools in labour organizations.

Selected trends in the depth of e-records readiness in labour organizations

Literature on contemporary labour relations shows that there is now a paradigm shift towards the social trade unionism orientation. This is the kind of trade unionism that "has a social sense and is concerned with broader socio-economic, political as well as the immediate concerns of its members" (ICFTU 2001).[1] This philosophical foundation is grounded in the belief of fair social transformation and justice and aims to influence society based on "its organized power, capacity to mobilize" and building effective "political and social alliances" (ICFTU 2001). It is "committed to workers control and democracy and to maintaining its character as a movement" (ICFTU 2001). Such a trade union movement is supposed to be effective and "proactive and able to negotiate and monitor complex agreements with government and employers" as well as making meaningful contributions to national development (ICFTU 2001; Wood 2001). However, the realization of this global orientation to society and workers' justice can only be realized if labour organizations adapt to the global, regional and national challenges through collectivism and solidarity with other stakeholders. Thus, the management of information in an e-environment can be able to provide an enabling framework that could enhance this solidarity and partnership for the good of the workers and society. Particularly, given that globalization continues to shape the socio-economic and political agenda, the utilization of ICTs, the level of information and knowledge management, skills and practices

are therefore underlining success factors of most labour organizations.

Nonetheless, it has been observed that labour organizations have been too slow and less eager to embrace and utilize or recognize the importance of ICTs especially in any of the three broad categories of their core activities, that is, collective bargaining, providing mutual insurance and campaigning for legal change (Lax 2001; Hoffer 2008). It has also been noted that, overall, labour organizations have been sluggish to take full advantage of the benefits of communicating online for the purpose of organization as compared with the manner in which commerce and government have grasped the new phenomenon (Hogan and Grieco 1999). Lax (2001) further observes that if labour organizations have to remain relevant and survive, they need to change their ways of functioning just as the worlds of industry, business and politics have transformed their ways of working due to the emergence and formulation of new concepts that have revolutionized the world.

In recent times there has been a pressing call for the labour organizations to modernize their activities and business processes because trade union activities and their respective processes are to a larger extent information and knowledge intensive. As has been observed elsewhere in this article, the utilization of ICTs in organizations, institutions, workplaces, households and at individual level has significantly revolutionized the world. Globalization driven by the ICT therefore signifies that the labour movement ought to cultivate ground-breaking and transformed cutting-edge skills. Development of radical skills that focus on the use of information, correspondingly, entail that the labour organizations should have knowledge management skills at their finger tips (Kalusopa 2008).

Literature shows that the new e-forms have may not be conclusive but have in the main offered great opportunities to labour organizations with regard to the management of information and knowledge, which is crucial to their modernization in terms of planning; evaluation; monitoring; decision-making; the process of collective bargaining; democracy; and accountability. In the United States of America (USA), the use of ICTs, for instance, has been found to be vital, effective and fundamental in the process of the organization of

labour. In a study of Information Technology, US Union Organizing and Union Effectiveness, Fiorito, Jarley and Delaney (2002) contend that it was revealed that there were three main new ICT aspects that were important and had practical significance:

- Playing a critical role in negotiations, conflicts with employers, organizing campaigns and communication with members;
- Computer skills have increasingly become important as a criterion in union staff hiring decisions and;
- E-mail has become part of the first level representative's daily routine in many workplaces.

The study ascertained that ICTs have in a way assisted and supported trade unions and their members in collaboration with management to reach common ground on issues and concerns such as negotiations, bargaining, recruitment and communication.

Further, in a world of constantly rising costs and expenditures, the web can be used effectively by labour organizations to conduct activities or events, such as commemorations or annual events (for example Labour Day Celebrations), at a minimized cost. To clearly illustrate this point, Diamond and Freeman (2002:576) have drawn attention, for instance, to a case in point that "…in September 2000 the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)[2] used its portal at www.workingfamilies.com to develop a virtual Labour Day for members to replace what had become a day of dwindling marches with ancient banners in ever fewer cities. The virtual Labour Day contain various interactive games, quizzes, music, and similar amusements revolving around union issues that might otherwise have been found at a traditional Labour Day March". This is still evident today.

In South Africa, one of the major federations, Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) uses the COSATU Daily News which has more than 1,600 subscribers and its website at http://www.cosatu.org.za to deliver policy statements, speeches, news, publications and daily press releases (Lewis 2008).

However, despite the numerous benefits of ICT use in the management of knowledge and information, access to the Internet by union workers has not been remarkable. Lack of access and limited usage of the Internet could be attributed to a number of reasons or

factors. The June/July 2001 "British Workplace Representation and Participation Survey on Internet Usage by Union Status", revealed that, among other things, age was a major contributing factor that hindered Internet usage (Diamond and Freeman 2002). The Survey also established that:

- The union workers were more interested in using the Internet to search for information about jobs. However, the Survey also revealed that union workers did much less job search on the web than non-union workers.

- In a situation where union workers had access to the Internet, the Survey showed that union workers did not use the full potential and advantages of the Internet. Further, the Survey, for instance, demonstrated that union workers made less use of discussion/online chats, accessing bulletin boards, or seeking information on financial and legal rights. This attitude could be premised on the notion that union workers have an alternative forum or channel of information and discussion (Diamond and Freeman 2002:570).

More recently, the labour organizations, for instance, have met with the difficult challenge of creating a global labournet. In this respect, the inability to reach the majority of the workers or failure to reach a critical mass; non-existent information support systems in unions; lack of access by the intended consumers; and generally the lack of an information skills base could be singled out as general obstacles to the realization and achievement of a global labournet.

Several labour relations scholars (Holly and Herman 2001; Kalusopa 2008; Hoffer 2008) have conclusively highlighted the fact that most labour organizations have embarked on a fundamental process of comprehension and utilization of ICTs in as much as access to ICTs is being significantly availed. To support such contention and observations, Holly and Herman (2001:35) have for example outlined a persuasive summary of at least five ways that illustrate and show that labour organizations now appreciate and employ ICTs or manage information and knowledge to their advantage:
- To counter the information balance in bargaining.
- To understand and address industrial and social change.

- To gain benefits from working with supportive, union-friendly organizations.
- To counter and reverse the tendency of information flows to follow and reinforce the given power structures.
- To underpin democratization both within unions and in the world in which they work.

Accordingly, in order to improve information and knowledge management such as internet access and utilization, Holly and Herman (2001) contend that there are three levels of internet access that are significantly and relevantly pertinent to labour organisations:
- Information quality and quantity;
- Technological infrastructure; and
- Availability of skills.

Firstly, labour organizations should have access to quantifiable information that has superior quality if they are to successfully engage in discussion or dialogue discourses. Quality and quantity information according to Holly and Herman (2001:37) is important for the labour movement "…because this might have a profound effect on the outcome of collective bargaining or campaigning on specific issues".

Secondly, lack of technological infrastructure could impose constraints on the ability to access ICTs. Poor technological infrastructure, lack of it, or high costs could threaten internal union democracy. According to Holly and Herman (2001:38), this may affect the tenets of centralized accounting systems and create a shift to "…centralized management information systems for the hierarchical control of the organization". The issue of technological infrastructure in the developed nations has somehow been rectified in that there is more private or individual ownership of technological equipment such as personal computers (PCs), therefore the developing world might still find it hard to deal with the potential problem of centralization due to financial constraints. In this regard, problems of effectively managing information, in the labour movement for instance, are further compounded.

Thirdly, if Trade Unions are to maximize the use of ICTs, to improve management of information and consequently knowledge, and have

increased access to the internet or the web, they need to be well grounded and equipped with ICT skills. Trade Unions therefore might be impeded by the non-availability, in most cases, of relevant ICT skills or maintenance of such technical skills in cases where they exist. Acquisition of technical skills by union workers equally and more importantly calls for and involves for instance. maintenance and support of hardware and software; use of applications; problems of back-up and security; and an investment in new organizational and technical skills (Holly and Herman 2001:39).

In all, the utilization of ICTs in labour management practices in labour organizations can now not be ignored as it is at the very core to the creation of opportunities that enhance labour relations activities such as member recruitment and negotiation skills or mediation and advocacy. Information management is thus very essential and central to the achievement of positive results in labour organizations.

E-record readiness in labour organizations in southern Africa

Since the 1990s, most of the labour organizations in the SADC have recorded decline in organizational structure evidenced by structural or institutional incapacity, fragmentation, unfocused education program-mes, poor information support base, lack of clear regional linkages and networks and eroded trade union solidarity and consciousness (Kalusopa 2007).

In the SADC countries, retrenchments arising out of privatization have reduced the membership to all time low levels. Further, in most SADC countries there has been a proliferation of "in-house" unions rather than sectoral or industrial. These "in-house" unions have a small membership in most cases without organizational ability and strength. This in itself is a challenge since the unity of purpose has in most cases been lost and employers have exploited the low rate of unionization against workers' pursuit of solidarity and better condi-tions of service in a workplace. In addition, most of these national unions including the Southern Africa Trade Union Co-ordination Council (SATUCC), which is the umbrella regional body for the labour movement in the SADC region, lack the capacity and resources to carry out their missions (Kalusopa 2007).

Fragmentation of the labour organizations continues to be a problem. In most countries there are parallel national federations operating. For example South Africa has three national centres; Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Lesotho have more than two (Kalusopa 2007). In most cases, it is common to find different unions in one country or organization "competing" to recruit members. Clearly, the rate of unionization is extremely low in the SADC. In essence, labour organizations are vehicles that seek to balance the organizational needs and that of the aspiration of the workers for better conditions of service and are supposed to provide a collective voice in solidarity for the productivity of the workplace. This decline in proactive trade union activities and lack of exploitation of the potential or opportunity to activate the sense of progressive renewal has become a matter of serious concern to the labour organizations in Southern Africa. Several suggestions now point to the fact that to remain viable and relevant, the labour organizations must modernize by building more "participative unionism" through better communication and providing effective leadership to support members in their workplace. At the core of the process of renewal lies the need to harness information as a critical resource (Kalusopa 2008). However, this can only happen if unions adapt to the global, regional and national challenges. Kalusopa (2008) has argued that there is a need to reorient the operations of labour organizations if workers are to benefit from their engagement with labour collectivism and solidarity and that ICTs provide a framework to enhance this solidarity and collectivism.

However, literature on ICT penetrations in labour organization remains scanty. Most general labour reports however give sweeping statements that indicate that the information infrastructural base and linkages of most of the national labour centres in the SADC are still weak and that the networking among most of the national labour centres and their affiliates has remained elusive (Kalusopa, 2008). The creation of linkages through strong regional information centres is also said to be absent and the information support system for most labour centres is also structurally non-existent. In Southern Africa, for instance, the problem of failure to reach critical mass has been underlined by a central example of the Southern Africa Trade Union Co-ordination Council (SATUCC), a trade union body for SADC, that lacks of a database and has failed to ensure that its affiliates are on-line for tracking or monitoring and keeping up-to-date information

such as registration, type of union activities, financial standing etc. At the core of the process of renewal lies the need to harness information as a critical resource (Kalusopa 2008).

E-readiness and e-records readiness and e-government in Botswana

As observed elsewhere in this article, several e-readiness and e-record readiness initiatives have thus far been launched over the past years and numerous e-readiness and e-record readiness assessment tools have also been created and used by different groups, each looking at various aspects of ICT, society, sectors and the economy (Mutula and Brakel 2006). In terms of measuring e-readiness, such assessments have been conducted at both macro (national, regional or global) and micro (sectoral) levels. In most developing countries such as Botswana, such assessments have formed the basis for the development of ICT policies that have guided the development of an information society and facilitated e-government (Little and Bose 2004). The National Policy for ICT Policy (2007: 5) for development also acknowledges this

> Formal ICT benchmarking and e-readiness assessment were conducted in June of 2004. These studies were invaluable in helping to determine the current state of ICT diffusion in Bots-wana and thereby clearly identifying the level of effort required to achieve the National ICT Vision, Goals and Objectives.

As observed also by Mutula and Brakel citing Heek (2002), the degree of e-government indeed largely depends on the level of e-readiness of the government and that the "lack of e-readiness, contributes to the lack and potential failure of e-government". E-government in this context entails "the use of ICTs to improve the delivery of government services and information, enhance efficiency and accountability of public administration and strengthen economic performance" (Wamukoya and Mutula 2005). Defined in this context therefore, e-government implies that various sectors in society such as business, labour organizations as well as common citizens should be able to use the "depth and breadth" of the e-environment (within and outside their organizations) to effectively engage government to make it accountable to the socio-economic development needs of the

people. This in turn means that the development any e-government initiatives should embrace all key sectors of society that are levers of national development – government, business (private sector) and labour. Table 1 shows the areas of priority for the rolling out of e-government in Botswana.

Table 1: Priority e-government services as identified by National ICT Policy (Maitlamo)

SNO	Service	Description
1	OMANG Registration	Registration of National Identity Cards (Omang). Omang provides all Batswana over 16 years of age with a national identity card & number. This should be linked with Births & Deaths Registration service.
2	Birth & Death Registration	Registration of births and deaths will go along with OMANG Registration service.
3	Vehicle Registration & Licensing	Providing license plate renewal, tax stickers, change of address, booking of road. tests, booking for driver training, disabled parking permits etc.
4	Company Registration & Business Licensing	Registration of companies, name search & approval, business start-up information etc.
5	Electronic Tax Filing	Filing of both personal & corporate taxes as well as VAT claims etc.
6	Construction Permits	The issuance of construction permits is an important companion to the Land Allocation Process service etc.
7	Work & Resident Permits	Processing of all the work & resident permits etc.
8	Passport applications	Application of Passports etc.
9	Patents & Tradeworks	The issuance of Patents, Trademarks and Industrial Designs on-line.
10	E-post	All possible postal services like letter & package tracking, digital storage etc.
11	Integrated	Electronic case management/tracking, document

SNO	Service	Description
	Justice	tracking, video based testimony etc.
12	E-laws	Providing electronic access to up-to-date official versions of the laws of Botswana.
13	Electronic Tendering	Government procurement process.
14	E-publications	Providing all government forms and publications.
15	Pension benefits	Registration for pension benefits.
16	E-tourism	Providing tourism related services i.e. VISA, Tourism Sites, booking etc.
17	Job On-line	Providing Government Vacancy information, applying for the vacancy etc.
18	Marriage Registration	Registration of all the married couples.
19	E-policing	Traffic offence, Case registration, Application for a police clearance certificate etc.

Source: Ministry of Science & Technology (MCST), 2007

Research and experience show that, unlike government and business entities, labour organizations' participation in national affairs must be through collective bargaining and sustained advocacy. Labour organizations, unlike the other organizations, are constituency-based and strive to make the development needs be transformed and reconstructed from one serving the interests of government or global capital to one whose motive should be to advance the interests of the workers and the people (Kanyenze, Kondo and Martens 2006). The role of labour organizations is therefore to monitor and measure progress on inclusive participatory national economic processes, good corporate ethics, underpinned by the principles of openness, integrity and accountability (Kanyenze, Kondo and Martens 2006). As observed by Kalusopa (2008), such a role would mean, among other things, that to participate meaningfully in the national development process, there is a need in modern times for labour organisations to develop capacity in information appreciation and use. This is so because the challenges of conception, initiation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities in labour organizations will always require the provision of reliable, pertinent and timely informa-tion, propelled by the application of ICTs (Kalusopa 2008). In the final

analysis, the depth and breadth of e-readiness and e-record readiness of labour organizations is therefore critical for their survival and relevance to national development.

Efficacy of the e-record readiness assessment tools

As earlier observed, several e-readiness initiatives have thus been launched over the past years to help developing countries in this area. However, there is common agreement in the literature reviewed that e-readiness assessment tools may be divided into two main categories: those that focus on assessing the basic infrastructure or a nation's readiness for business or economic growth; and those that focus on assessing the ability of the country to benefit from ICTs. Specifically, Bridges.org (2001) suggests that most assessments are focused on assessing:

- Physical infrastructure (telephone, electricity etc) with high bandwidth, reliable, and affordable;
- High-speed access to ICT in government, healthcare facilities and homes;
- Integration and use of ICT in everyday life;
- Existence of government policies that support and promote connectedness;
- Existence of legislative and regulatory framework;
- Provision of adequate information communication channels;
- Existence of legislative and regulatory framework;
- Provision of adequate information communication channels;
- Guaranteed user privacy and online security;
- Universal access – technologies which are accessible and usable by all citizens including the very young and the elderly, and people with different disabilities; and
- E-records readiness – freedom of access to information, conformance existing laws, skills and competencies, disaster preparedness, retention and disposal strategies.

As alluded to in the last bullet above, e-records readiness can thus be said to be part and parcel of e-readiness. As defined earlier in this article, e-records readiness further implies that the management of e-records must satisfy the recordkeeping functionalities based on agreed practice such as ISO 15489 if such records are to be an effective component of any e-environment. In other words, the need

to assess the information and records management capacity of any agency or organization is a foundation for effective delivery of e-readiness in any environment.

It has, however, been observed that although most of e-readiness assessment tools refer to records and information, they do not accurately assess the e-records readiness of such organizations and "do not permit an accurate assessment of e-records readiness" (IRMT 2004).

It is owing to the above that the IRMT and World Bank in 2003 developed e-records readiness tools to support a "more in-depth evaluation and to identify relevant capacity building resources." Thus, citing the relevance of accurately assessing e-records readiness in any e-government environment, the International Records Management Trust (2004) appropriately puts it that "failing to address e-records issues as a component of e-government will jeopardize the substantial financial investment required to launch e-government." The IRMT further observes that in an e-government environment, e-records readiness tools were "designed to be used in conjunction with existing e-government readiness tools to permit a high-level assessment of the infrastructure and capacity required to manage records and information" (IRMT 2004). The aim of developing an e-record readiness assessment tool was thus to assist governmental organizations to assess their e-records readiness against internationally accepted standards. The IRMT (2004) e-records readiness tool was intended to provide a benchmark for organizations to assess themselves and to determine where they stand relative to the above issues. It was also intended to provide information to assist organizations to develop plans and strategies aimed at improving both their paper-based and e-records environment. Specifically, the tool addresses the following issues: awareness and ownership; ICT – records management integration; laws, policies, and procedures; resources and training; records management program management; and long-term preservation and accessibility. From literature reviewed, this is one of the efforts in terms of application that most countries in the ESARBICA regions have attempted to use in assessing e-records readiness in the public sector.

However, while this tool presents an important basis for measuring e-records readiness, there seems to be a dearth of information on the extent to which this e-records readiness tool has been tested in government agencies and in particular non-governmental organizations. Literature reviewed shows a scant pattern of evidence of the extent of how this e-record assessment tool has been used. Interviews with key personnel involved in the project at the IRMT indicate that this tool has been used or tested in public or government agencies in countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Botswana, South Africa and Zambia. There is, however, no "institutionalised knowledge" on the extent of the merits and demerit of the tool. Although the tool is said to descriptive, highly qualitative and diagnostic regarding the depth of the e-records readiness in government agencies, several questions do arise, for example:

- Can what the e-records readiness assessment tools measure in terms of content and context be said to be universal in all sectors?
- To what extent have the e-readiness assessment processes and methodology improved the understanding of e-records readiness and brought about related benefits in electronic recordkeeping in organisations?
- Have the e-records readiness assessments been sufficient to target the use of ICT and records and information in a broader development context as seen by all stakeholders?
- How effective have the e-readiness assessment processes and methodology been in records management projects in terms of planning, design, implementation, and support?
- How should the e-records readiness assessment be extrapolated and improved within the context of National ICT policy developments and be aligned to the development of good records management practices in organisations beyond the public sector?

It is these questions that should challenge records managers and other information professionals to interrogate such e-records readiness assessment tools so that their usefulness to the management of e-records in several sectors can be ascertained.

Assessing e-record readiness: what could be the lessons for labour organizations in Botswana?

The proliferation of e-records has introduced many challenges to labour organizations in Botswana, many of which are unaware of the numerous issues pertaining to the creation, storage and retrieval and dissemination of e-records (Kalusopa 2007). Currently there are various assessment tools that that have been put in place to assess the depth of e-readiness all over the world. The question, therefore, that needs to be addressed is whether the existing e-records readiness framework is appropriate for assessing e-records readiness in labour organizations.

Literature on the penetration and depth of ICTs and information management practices in Botswana shows varying levels of development in the various sectors. This has been as a result of the various strategies and efforts that the government has made to promote the use of ICTs designed to achieve high productivity and efficiency in its operations. For example, the government in Botswana has continued to make progressive investments in the ICT sector since the 1990s. These investments have resulted in the establishment of a basic ICT infrastructure in the country. According to the Government Computer Bureau (GCB), expenditure on ICT projects represented 0.2% of the total budget of Botswana's seventh National Development Plan (NDP7) covering the period 1991-1997; capital expenditure on ICT projects during NDP8 (1997-2003) increased tenfold to 1.9% of the development budget. This commitment to ICT use in government is expected to grow to about 3.7% during the remainder of NDP9 (covering the period 2003-2009) (GCB 2003). The government has also put in place a National ICT policy which is designed to guide the ICT environment. In addition to this, the government is enacting various pieces of legislation, including the recent amendment of the National Archives Act, to back up the implementation of the National ICT policy.

As in other African countries, the increasing production of electronic information in Botswana has undoubtedly raised various challenges including understanding its depth, access and use in several segments of the society. Studies for example by Keakopa (2006), Mutula (2005), and Moloi (2006) have attempted to look at e-records in the

government, business and private sectors in Botswana but there has been little examination of the impact of ICTs in labour organizations. Other studies within the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council of Archives (ESARBICA) by Akotia (2002), Katuu (2004), Mutiti (2002) and Wamukoya and Mutula (2005), Wato (2006), Wamukoya and Mnjama (2007) on the challenges of e-records management capacity attempt to recommend, among others, the need for e-records readiness as critical to an effective e-records management strategy in the region but also do not go far enough and neither interrogate current e-record readiness assessment tools nor do they propose specific sector models. They particularly do not discuss depth of e-records in key constituents such as the labour organizations and how such organisations could be integrated in promoting or being part of the broader e-government initiatives. Several questions therefore arise about the applicability or usefulness of such tools to labour organisation such as:

- How do labour organizations differ from public sector organizations and how can e-record readiness assessment processes be used to understand the management of e-records in the context of labour organizations?
- How should such assessments of e-records readiness evolve? Should it be seen from the point of view of users, practitioners and records experts or IT experts? If there is some synergy, what form must it take and what are common denominators?
- Is there a need for a different model or framework that can be developed for labour organizations from the existing tools?

These are, therefore, the pertinent methodological questions that form the on-going debate about the content, measurements, outputs, benefits, management and implementation of the e-record readiness assessments.

Future questions

The discussions and questions raised above call for further inquiry into the efficacy of most e-records readiness assessment tools. Thus in terms of content and measurement; outputs and benefits; management and implementation such tools need to:

- Provide more information on assessment tools and how to use them comprehensively within the local context and sectors rather than providing generic frameworks.

- Measure ICT use not only in terms of statistical density and the conformity to management of e-records as per best practice but beyond the generic or conventional indices to evolve models based on specific sector organisation culture.
- Refine and standardize data collection processes of e-records management and create a methodology for benchmarking across specific sectors.
- Institutionalize knowledge about the e-record readiness processes by creating national institutional knowledge or "clearing-houses" of all available data on e-record readiness assessments. National Archives and Records Management institutions could provide the leadership and frameworks for this. This could also deal with duplication of efforts in such assessment projects.
- Create national consortium of intellectuals, record management practitioners, government, business, labour organizations including civil society to provide guidance on a framework that should influence change in the management of e-records and definition of e-government.
- Make such assessments to be rallying points of local solutions and action plans on the best way to manage e-records in all organizations and thus promote e-government.

Conclusion

This article has raised the question of whether we could build a contextual and conceptual e-records readiness framework for labour organizations. It is clear from literature reviewed that labour organizations have now embraced the utilisation of ICTs in negotiations and bargaining; recruitment; administrative costs reduction; reinvention and improved public image; improved services; enhanced democracy and accountability; and generally for communication. It is in this light that we have explored from the literature the need to have a framework to appropriately assess e-records readiness in labour organizations so that the extent of how they have embraced the management of e-records could be properly understood.

The literature reviewed has shown that e-records readiness assessments are meant to guide development efforts by providing

benchmarks for comparison and gauging progress in organisations in understanding the depth of e-records management. In this context, the need to interrogate the use and usefulness of e-records readiness assessments is thus relevant for records and information professionals. It is such interrogation that could form the basis for building models of institutionalised knowledge that are based on local context and are sector specific. Accordingly, it is such models of "institutionalised knowledge" that could guide the action on the management of e-records in the ESARBICA region.

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Endnotes

1. The ICFTU is now called the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), formed on 1 November 2006 out of the merger with the World Confederation of Labour (WCL).
2. American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, commonly AFL-CIO, is a national trade union centre, the largest federation of unions in the United States, made up of 56 national and international unions (including Canadian), together representing more than 10 million workers.