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# THE ROLE OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN PROMOTING BUSINESS EFFICIENCY AND SERVICE DELIVERY AT KENYA PORTS AUTHORITY (KPA)

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## Abstract

*This paper presents the findings of a qualitative study carried out in 2007. The aim of the study was to assess the different aspects of records management at Kenya Ports Authority (KPA). The study population constituted; 136 officers, 36 records management staff and seven heads of departments (HODs) from KPA. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and observation. The key findings of the study established that KPA as the study organization has inefficient records management practices. Among the recommendations of the study were that; KPA should streamline its records management practices and there was need for acquisition of appropriate resources for implementation of the records management programme. It is suggested that further research should be carried out in other parastatals in developed and developing countries with the purpose of comparing them with this study and secondly, research can also be carried out to assess records management in private or non governmental organisations in Kenya. This will help to compare the state of records management in a government based organisation and from the private organisation*

## Keywords

Records Management, Information, Service delivery, Business Efficiency, Kenya

## Introduction

Information is an inherent part of a record and the management of records implies managing information within these records. Records management (RM) refers to:

.... the general administrative management concerned with achieving economy and efficiency in the creation, maintenance, use and disposal of records in organizations throughout the lifecycle and in making the information they contain available in support of the business of that organisation (IRMT and the World Bank 1999:19).

Records are carries of information and proper management of records ensures that the information they contain is made available in support of business activities, decision-making, improved productivity and efficiency of services among others. However, the management of records is done through a coherent and consistent records management control tools such as guidelines, policies, regulations, legislations and standards from the creation stage to preservation and use.

## Background Information of KPA

Kenya Ports Authority (KPA) is a statutory body under the Ministry of Transport. KPA is managed by a board of directors appointed by the relevant Minister. KPA's mission is to

promote national and international development through the provision of efficient and cost-effective import and export services. The role of KPA is to provide the necessary facilities for docking of ships and loading and unloading of cargo. Currently, KPA has seven divisions mainly; Human Resources and Administration, Finance division, Harbour Master and Chief Operations, Technical Services, Corporate Services, Legal Services and the Directorate. KPA has a total of twenty seven departments under these divisions.

KPA's vision was to be rated among the top twenty ports in the world in terms of performance and reputation by the year 2010. On the other hand, KPA's mission is to promote national and international development through the provision of efficient and cost-effective import and export services.

### **Nexus between records management and KPA's mandate**

Records are carriers of information and are an inherent resource in any organisation. For efficient and cost-effective provision of services at KPA, there is need for information held in records to be provided in an accurate, reliable and timely manner. This can only be achieved if proper records management is done to aid in informed decision-making, efficient service delivery, among others.

However, KPA is characterized by unnecessary and time-consuming bureaucratic procedures, (Emerging Market Economics and Almaco Management Consultants Ltd 2005). As a result, there are delays in decision-making and dispute resolution, as information or records are delayed in passing from one officer to another. Moreover, records are checked by a couple of officers resulting in delays and greater scope for malpractice. In addition, due to the fact that the import and export system is basically paper-based, huge amounts of paper records are produced, making their management cumbersome.

### **The role of Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service at KPA**

KPA records management was being undertaken within the framework of Kenya National Archives Act. According to Mnjama (2003), the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service was established by the Kenya Public Archives and Documentation Service Act of 1965. Its mission is to excel as an archives service for all Kenyans; serve as the memory of the nation through preservation of valuable public records as part of the information resources of the Republic of Kenya, and to make them accessible to present and future generations.

KPA receives advisory services on storage and preservation of its archival material from Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service. This is because the Act empowers the Director of National Archives or his/her nominee to examine and advise on the care, preservation, custody and control of any public records. The Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service Act further stipulates that the Director of the National Archives may, approve any institution, whether private or otherwise as a place wherein may be deposited, housed or

preserved either permanently or temporarily by any public archives, or records which have been declared public records (Mnjama 2003).

### **Statement of the problem**

KPA is faced with the problem of documentation and records keeping resulting from the huge amounts of paper records that are generated from its business transactions. KPA experiences delayed processing of customer goods leading to inefficient and ineffective service delivery. Computerisation of KPA operations resulted in the generation of large amounts of electronic records that need to be effectively managed alongside the paper-based records. Properly managed, records are key for decision-making, improved productivity and efficiency, audit trail and preservation of corporate memory. This study sought to assess records management practices at KPA with a view to making informed recommendations that can help cut bureaucracy and improve service delivery.

### **Objectives of the study**

The aim of the study is to assess records management at KPA in Kenya and the objectives of the study were to:-

- i) Assess effectiveness of information flow at KPA.
- ii) Determine types of records generated at KPA.
- iii) Investigate how records are used, retained and disposed.
- v) Establish effectiveness of records infrastructure and tools.
- v) Determine the strengths and weaknesses of records management at KPA.
- vi) Propose measures to improve records management at KPA.

### **Methodology**

The research drew upon both qualitative and quantitative paradigms with a case study research design. KPA staff formed the population which was sampled for purposes of data collection. The study targeted 14 heads of departments (HODs), 136 action officers, and 36 records management staff distributed in seven (7) divisions and 27 departments at KPA. This resulted to a sample size of 179. Action officers are members of staff who create and use the records but are not necessarily records management staff. On the other hand, records management staffs undertake records management activities and are skilled, experienced or trained in different aspects of records management. In the same vein, heads of department (HODs), who are top level management staff were selected because of their decision making responsibilities within the organisation. The sampling method used was purposive and data was collected through in depth interviews from the HODs, and different structured questionnaires for both action officers and records management staff. In addition, an unobtrusive observation was also employed across all respondents. SPSS was used for data analysis and the findings are presented through frequency tables and pie charts. The interview findings were presented through thematic categorisation.

## **Records management**

Robek, Brown and Stephens (1996) argue that every organisation generates records. They call for properly managed records to support decision making, improve productivity and efficiency and preserve corporate memory among other reasons. The management of records is done through a coherent and consistent records management control tools such as guidelines, policies, regulations, legislations and standards from the creation stage to preservation and use. Similarly, compliance with regulations, legislations and standards varies greatly between organisations. However, one of the first international standards devoted to records management is the ISO 15489. The ISO standard for records management includes (Wikipedia 2006):-

- Setting policies and standards;
- Assigning responsibilities and authorities;
- Establishing and promulgating procedures and guidelines;
- Providing a range of services relating to the management and use of records;
- Designing, implementing and administering specialised systems for managing records;  
and
- Integrating records management into business systems and processes.

## **Importance of records management**

The World Bank (2006) states that records are essential for the effective and productive functioning of private and public organisations. Records document the decisions and activities of governments and organisations, and serve as a benchmark by which future activities and decisions are measured. Moreover, without records there can be no rule of law and no accountability. In addition, without good records, members of staff are forced to take decisions on an ad hoc basis without the benefit of an institutional memory (IRMT 1999).

Good records management is important to ensure that information is readily available when needed (IRMT and the World Bank 1999). Moreover, good records management ensures that records of archival and historical value are preserved and those which are no longer of use are destroyed. Records management practices ensure economic, effective and efficient handling of records. In addition, proper records management provides clear accountability structure, audit trails and enhances good governance.

## **Records management programme**

Shepherd and Yeo (2003) argue that records management programme involves systematic control of all records from their creation or receipt through processing, distribution, organisation, and retrieval to their ultimate preservation and disposition. However, records

management programmes vary from one organisation to another, but typically comprise a number of elements. These include:-

- Setting and monitoring policies and standards for records management through the organisation.
- Designing and implementing records management systems.
- Informing and educating staff about records management.

### **Records generation**

Records refer to information created, received, and maintained as evidence by an organisation or person in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business (IRMT 1999). Records also encompass all media in all parts of the organisation and in all forms. These media can be: papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, CD's or other documentary materials. Organisations generate, use and manage different information types in the course of executing business functions. These records can either be in paper form or electronic formats and range from administrative, legal, financial, personnel, students' records, land records, among others, depending on the nature, activities and role of the organisation (Tweedy 1986).

### **Records retention and disposal**

According to IRMT (1999), not all records in an organisation are of long-term value. Consequently, some records are only useful for a limited time after which they can be disposed of. This may involve transfer of the records to another storage space for example, records centre or archives. Tayfun and Gibson (1996) point out that at retention and disposition stage, records retention schedules are written to establish policy on the retention and disposition of records. Records schedules ensure that records are retained for the required period. Moreover, records disposal ensures that records are removed to low-cost storage and destroyed once they become inactive or their value declines. Kennedy and Schauder (1998) note that disposition, results in disposal of records, or if they have historical value, their transfer to archival storage. In addition, other than the transfer of records, the destruction of records once their retention period expires lies in this stage.

### **Records management infrastructure or resources**

Shepherd and Yeo (2003: 249) state that: "...records management resources are a prerequisite for an effective records management service".

Proper records management requires trained staff, adequate and continuous funding, appropriate environmental conditions and physical security, among others (World Bank 2006). The implementation of any records management system or programme will require adequate financial resources (Shepherd & Yeo 2003). This is because there will be recurrent costs for staff, accommodation, supplies, equipment and services purchased. Similarly, there is need for trained

and qualified staff to be engaged in the implementation of the records management programme. The International Records Management Trust [IRMT] (1999) argues that, the quality of archives and records management, is relatively equivalent to the staff involved, and furthermore, several types of staff are needed (Kennedy & Schauder 1998). Availability of adequate accommodation/space is also another fundamental resource in any records management programme. Tayfun and Gibson, (1996) argue that this essential element of records management ensures that records remain secure, intact, accessible and intelligible for as long as they are needed. Similarly, IRMT (1999) states that sufficient and appropriate equipment and materials should be provided for the handling, storage and preservation of records throughout the life cycle. These can include file folder boxes, shelving and cabinets to facilitate proper management of records. In addition, records and archives work is increasingly seen as part of a larger sphere of information management and this has led to adoption of the use of computers and other technologies to create store and share information, reducing the need for paper records and improving services (IRMT 1999).

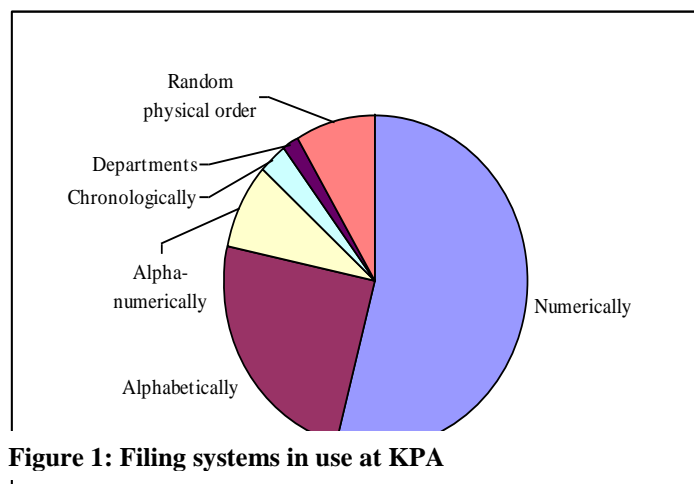
## **Discussion of findings**

### ***The effectiveness of information flow at KPA***

The findings on the effectiveness of information flow at KPA revealed that KPA divisions and departments work as single entities and information flows are only limited within specific departments or sections. This limits information sharing between departments and thus results in a lot of duplication of information and records in different departments. Information flows between organisation departments allows for information sharing and thus curbs duplication of data, information and records.

### ***Types of records generated at KPA***

The findings revealed that KPA generated both paper based and electronic records. Kennedy and Schauder (1998) argue that the increasing trend in organisations to create, communicate and store information in electronic format has led to generation of massive e-records. Moreover, KPA also generates different types of records such as; financial, administrative, medical etc in the course of running its operations. The creation of records is a fundamental aspect of the management of any business operation, government or private organization and thus proper management of the created records is vital (Kansas State Historical Society 2005). Similarly, results on the frequency with which records are generated show that KPA generates massive quantities of records on a daily basis in both paper and electronic formats. However, it was also evident that there were different classification and filing systems that KPA adopts in different departments. The results as recorded in Figure 1 shows that 57 (53.8%) of the respondents filed records numerically, 26 (24.5%) alphabetically, 9 (8.5%) alpha-numerically, 3 (2.8%) chronologically, 2 (1.9%) by departments and 9 (8.5%) stated that records were filed by random physical order.



**Figure 1: Filing systems in use at KPA**

### ***Use retention and Disposal of records at KPA***

The finding revealed that KPA experiences different problems with managing paper records that include; difficulty coping with huge documents, inadequate control of records and misfiling, duplication of records, delays in processing of files, excessive time in retrieval, high costs of distributing files and lack of proper management of non-current records. Dearstyne (2006) argues that, inactive or non-current records should be segregated from active records and stored away from busy office areas so as to curb office congestion. Lack of a retention schedule was confirmed though they were in the process of developing the retention schedules for all departments. A retention schedule specifies the length of time that records must be maintained by the organisation and when they must be destroyed and making it a vital records management tool in any organisation, (Kennedy & Schauder 1998). At KPA, the retention schedule is in the process of being developed and is in line with the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Act. The records retention schedules must comply with any applicable statutes or regulations imposed by the government, and must address the organisation’s business needs for information retention (Robek, Brown & Stephens 1996). In addition, KPA used different disposal and destruction methods for some departments/offices including transfer to archives, and burning and shredding as methods of destruction. Other records destruction methods that can be used include burying and recycling, (Agere, Lemieux & Mazikana 1999). Similarly, the destruction and disposal actions of records at KPA were well documented. Agere, Lemieux and Mazikana (1999) observe that destruction and disposal of records should be certified to ensure proof that indeed they were disposed of.

### ***Effectiveness of records infrastructure and tools***

This aspect looked at different resources, mainly, RM policies, budgetary allocation (funds), storage space, staff, among others. KPA produces both paper and electronic records. On inquiry on the awareness of the RM policy, most HODs did not seem to know of its existence. This perhaps is an indication of lack of awareness of records management issues at KPA. Agree, Lemieux and Mazikana (1999) define a records management policy as a foundation or framework for successful records and information management programme in an organisation. The budgetary allocation for records management should always be adequate and specific to cater for all records management needs. Agree, Lemieux and Mazikana (1999) state that information or records are valuable resources that should be managed in the same manner as other costly and or valuable resources. On the other hand, the finding also revealed that the storage facilities were dilapidated and did not suit a modern office environment. Kennedy and Schauder (1998) observe that facilities (physical assets and support services) such as equipment and furniture should be appropriate so as to enhance the execution of records management roles, functions and activities.



On the issue of RM staff the findings revealed that most records management staff are high school leavers who have no qualifications on records management skills and that most records management staff in the registries were not trained while others held certificates in records management from Bandari College. The results were as indicated in Table 1. It is evident that 41 (51.9%) were high school graduates while 13 (48.1%) of the respondents were college graduates but were not trained in records management.

**Table 1:** Qualifications of staff (N = 27)

Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage
High school graduate	14	51.9%
College graduates (not trained in RM)	13	48.1%
Total	27	100.0%

IRMT (1999) states that the quality of archives and records management is relatively equivalent to the staff involved. Kachala (2002) argues that there is need for provision of appropriate training to the staff so as to attain and upgrade their skills.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of RM programme at KPA***

The majority of respondents indicated that the records management programme has documented goals while the minority stated no goals were documented. The results as recorded in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Records management challenges

Records management challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of promotion of recordkeeping culture within the organisation (N=24)	18	75.0%
Lack of adequate storage space (N=28)	23	82.1%
Lack of skilled records managers (N=26)	16	61.5%
Inadequate storage facilities and equipment (N=24)	18	7.5%
Problems of managing the shift to paperless office (N=34)	2	5.9%
Lack of proper file movement control tools (N=23)	14	60.8%
Lack of decentralised registries or records units in departments (N=24)	4	16.7%
Keeping central control of different record systems (N=24)	15	62.5%

The results show that 23 (82.1%) of respondents identified lack of adequate storage, 18 (75.0%) lack of promotion of recordkeeping culture within the organisation, 15 (62.5%) keeping central control of different record systems, 16 (61.5%) lack of skilled records managers and 14 (60.8%)

lack of proper file movement control tools. Other problems include lack of decentralised registries or records units in departments 4 (16.7%) and problems of managing the shift to paperless office 2 (5.9%).

The computerisation of KPA operations resulted in generation of electronic records. Kansas State Historical Society (2005) observes that in designing new information systems several aspects of recordkeeping should be considered in order to establish whether, the system supports electronic recordkeeping, or plan to produce and file in hard copies all of the records that the system generates. On inquiry on the challenges faced in implementing records management, the findings revealed that KPA is faced with different problems with major problems being lack of promotion of record keeping culture within the organisation, lack of adequate storage facilities, lack of skilled records managers and lack of proper file movement controls in place. These problems have not largely been documented. Despite the different problems faced by KPA, many problems were not discussed between junior staff and their seniors.

Shepherd and Yeo (2003) argue that, one of the elements of a records management programme is informing and educating staff about records management programme and its goals. However, KPA records management programme was regularly reviewed and this contends with what the archivist/archives HOD who is responsible for the records management programme stated. In addition, Shepherd and Yeo (2003) advocate audits or reviews of records management programmes so as to evaluate the creation or receipt, distribution, organisation, retrieval, preservation and disposition of records management practices.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

Several issues emanated from the findings as recorded. In essence the study has established that, developing countries still lag behind in different records management issues compared to the developed countries. With regard to information flow at KPA the study established that it was limited to departmental and sectional level. This curbs information sharing across the organisations departments, resulting to duplication of information and records in different departments.

KPA generated large amounts of records both paper and electronic on a daily basis. However, standardisation of classification and filing of these records across these organisational departments was lacking. KPA did not have an approved records retention and disposal schedule but drafts were being developed for different departments. Transfer of records from all departments/offices to archives was therefore not done regularly and non-current records still occupied important office space.

Several problems relating to the management of records at KPA were identified. These include lack of adequate storage space, lack of proper storage conditions in storage areas, lack of effective file tracking tools, lack of proper storage facilities, ineffective security measures, lack of forums for discussion of records management problems, lack of liaison with records management staff in computerisation of KPA operations among others. However, KPA budget

for records management programme was specific and adequate. Moreover, training opportunities for records management staff were available and different modes of training such as organising seminars, workshops, etc were conducted to equip action officers with records management skills. The key outcomes of the study are to provide a proposal to KPA on how to improve its records management programme, to provide the best practice of records management from which KPA may learn from and to provide a framework as a basis for financial support for KPA records management programme.

The recommendations of the study therefore follow. First, there is need for KPA to have proper and systematic information flows between the departments. This will allow for information sharing and avoid duplication of information. Secondly, KPA should adopt a standardised functional classification and filing system for its paper records, to ensure uniformity and consistency in all departments. Similarly, there is need to develop a classification system for electronic records. The functional classification system to be developed can be adapted to classify electronic records. Thirdly, there is need to develop a records retention and disposal schedule aligned to the national legislation for all departments. Fourthly, KPA should develop records management policies for both paper and electronic based records, acquire appropriate records management equipment for paper-based records, and train its action officers on records management. Lastly, there is need for KPA to create awareness of its records management goals so that the different members of staff may work towards achieving them.

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