

PERSONAL RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CIVIL SERVICE PENSION PAYMENT SYSTEM IN TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

A study was carried to examine the management of personal records in public sector and its impact on the payment of pension to retired public servants. A total of 65 respondents were involved in the study from three different ministries and one government agency. Non probability sampling method was used to obtain the sample. Questionnaire, interviews and observation methods were used to obtain the data. The study revealed that the state of personal records management is not satisfactory. The information available in the files is incomplete and in some cases inaccurate. Lack of skills and knowledge in records management, poor and inadequate facilities, communication breakdown, negligence and meagre allocation of resources are some of the constraints facing records management departments. The impact of this is the persistent delays in payment of pension to beneficiaries. The study recommends among others, formulation of organizational records management policy, staff training, automation of records management practices and creation of a master files for all public servants.

KEYWORDS: ARCHIVAL RECORDS, PENSION BENEFITS,
RETIREMENT BENEFIT

Introduction

Throughout the world, organizations produce a lot of information that is stored in the form of records. Information is one of the most important resources needed for planning and decision-making. Robek (1995:2) points out that the degree of success of any organization today depends on the way they manage their information. Records management is an input to smooth functioning of operations in any organization.

The employee's records are very important as they are the basis for decision-making on staff promotion, transfer and even disciplinary action. The records are also used in determining employee's pension entitlements and other fringe benefits. Without the records being accurate and properly managed, it is difficult to make any rational decision on the employee on various matters.

Studies indicate that records management in Tanzania has been unfavourable due to its poor management resulting in poor public services and operations. This is evident from the claims of delays of staff promotions, payments of various allowances and notably, serious problem of delays in paying pension. This has been confirmed by Wamukoya (2000:28) as he states that, "... too familiar is the story of delay in pension payments due to unavailability or incompleteness of pension records". Commenting on the same problem, Ndibalema (2001:4) noted that, "...there are many complaints from the clients that they are either not paid on time or their particulars are not kept properly and are sometimes completely not seen." Kitalu (2001) also noted that that there are hardly any records at the Ministry of Finance Headquarters on which to base calculation of pensions for permanently appointed employees. It is equally argued that in many developing countries, it is rare to find personal files that are complete. They often include inaccurate or out of date information (World Bank, 2004).

It is in this context that this study was conducted to examine personal records management in the public sector in Tanzania and its impact on the payment of pensions. Focus was on personal records creation procedures and its management throughout all stages of the records life cycle. Specifically, this study had the following objectives:

- (i) to examine personal file creation, access, retrieval, tracking and filing system;
- (ii) to examine skills and qualifications of records managers;
- (iii) to determine problems associated with the management of personal records;
- (iv) to determine the impact of personal records management on pension payment; and
- (v) to recommend ways of improving personal records management in the public sector.

Records Management in Tanzania: An Overview

Records management in Tanzania has a long history deeply rooted in the colonial period. Official records can be traced as far back as 1884 when Carl Peters signed a number of treaties with local chiefs. The German Colonial Government kept records of its activities some of which survived the First World War and making part of the Tanzania National Archives today. According to Mhina (2001), such records have issues on organization and administration of German rule, finance, shipping, army, justice, library science, trade, mining and construction.

When the British took over from the Germans, they created a lot of official records including district books. In 1950, the British Government created a Standard Registry Plan to be used by all provinces (Mhina, 2001). They also introduced a number of regulations regarding proper management and disposal of records. In 1927, for example, a circular entitled "the destruction of old records" was introduced (Magaya, 2004).

Post independent Tanzania experienced a rapid increase of government documents that were regularly misplaced and duplication of files on the same subject. In order to solve this problem, the government created the Tanzania National Archives and the National Archives Act to govern and improve the management of public records in the country (Magaya, 2004).

The management of records in the ministries and other government offices in Tanzania however, has faced a number of problems. These range from inadequate and untrained records management

staff, lack of adequate space for storage of the records, use of traditional methods of managing records to lack of working gear.

In its efforts to address these problems, the Tanzanian Government, donor agencies and the International Records Management Trust went into improving the records management system in the country. Between 1997 and 2003 for example, the President's Office, Public Service Management (PO-PSM) facilitated the organization of files in ministries. Improvements were made in filing systems, unused files were removed, registry clerks were trained and physical infrastructure was upgraded (Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, 2005).

Despite those efforts, poor public records management is still an issue that needs continuing efforts in improving their management. This research was therefore intended to explore the way records are currently managed in government ministries in Tanzania with specific focus on their impact on the payment of pension to retirees.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted *The Records Continuum Model* developed by Frank Upward in 1997 (Kennedy, 1998). The model focuses on the management of records as a continuous process. The model looks at managing records in the light of questions such as:

- What records need to be captured to provide evidence of an action?
- What systems and rules are needed to ensure those records are captured and maintained?
- How long should the records be kept to meet business and other requirements?
- How should the records be stored? and
- Who should have access to the records?

The model describes records in terms of content, context and structure. Paderson (1999) states that such a model has four basic records keeping functions abbreviated as CADS:

- Control: Capture, identification and control;
- Accessibility: Ensuring access to the records and usability;
- Disposal: Setting up provision for cleansing the regime of records that are no longer needed; and
- Storage: Maintaining record authenticity, integrity and usability over time.

This model was considered the most appropriate for this study as it highlights how the records should be managed in terms of creation, accessibility, storage and distribution. The model guided the study in examining how the records are actually stored in the ministries to ensure their safety throughout the time the employees are in the job.

The study thus adopted this model to determine the extent to which the activities involved in personal records creation and management in the selected ministries in Tanzania relate to the components of the model. The discussion of the findings of the research questions therefore, hovers around the questions that are raised in the model. The study thus, focused on the rules that are needed to ensure that the records and the content of the records are well captured; the maintenance and retrieval of records when needed to facilitate payment of pensions.

Methodology

This study was carried out in three ministries and one government agency, all in Dar es Salaam City, the capital of Tanzania during the 2005/2006 academic year. The choice of these ministries was based on the role they played in the retirees’ pension payment process. These are:

- (i) Ministry of Finance (MOF). This is the ministry responsible for processing and paying all retired public servants throughout the country;
- (ii) President’s Office Public Service Management (PO-PSM). This ministry is responsible for employing public servants, confirming their appointments, transfers and retirements;
- (iii) Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS). This was picked as a sample to represent other ministries facing problems related to management of personal records. The assumption here was that the records management system in one ministry is likely to be the same in others and therefore has the same impact on the payment of pension.
- (iv) Public Service Pension Fund (PSPF). This is a government agency commissioned to deal with pension matters for retired public servants.

A total of 65 respondents were selected; comprising registry clerks, registry supervisors, pension registry clerks, action officers, pension officers and clients. Others were the Principal Human Resources Officer and Pension Accountant. Table 1 presents a list of respondents.

Table 1: List of respondents involved in the study

Respondents	Number	Ministry/ Agency
Registry Clerks	12	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
Registry Clerks	10	President’s Office Public Service Management
Pension Registry Clerks	6	Ministry of Finance
Action Officers	5	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
Clients	18	Previously employed by various ministries
Principal Human Resources Development Officer	1	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
Pension registry supervisor	1	Ministry of Finance
Pension Accountant	1	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
Pension officers	10	Public Service Pension Fund
Pension Officer	1	Ministry of Finance
Total	65	

Source: Field Survey, 2005/2006

The sampling method used to get the samples was purposive sampling. This is a non probability sampling technique where the researcher picked a sample using his own judgement. The researcher had to use this technique so as to purposively involve those who are centrally responsible for facilitating payment of pension benefits. This is the information rich category which random sampling could not assure their involvement in the study.

In getting access to the clients, the researcher used convenient sampling method. Any client who came to the Ministry of Finance to make a follow-up for pension benefits during the research period from 2005 to 2006 was conveniently included in the study. This method was appropriate since clients did not have definite dates and times in making follow-ups for their payments. Therefore, it is those who visited the Ministry for their claims during the research period that were involved in the study.

Data collection methods included the questionnaire that was completed by the respondents themselves. The clients completed them on the spot as it was difficult to get them thereafter. The registry clerks and action officers were allowed to complete the questionnaire at their own convenient time.

Face to face interviews were conducted with the Principal Human Resource Officer, Registry accountant and Registry supervisors. These were purposely selected since they were considered to be more knowledgeable and experienced in the problem under study. There was also participant observation that allowed the researcher to observe the keeping of records and filing system in the registries. The researcher also observed a sample of 25 randomly selected personal files of retired civil servants from Ministries of Finance and Agriculture and Food Security. These included pending files for either being incomplete or those returned from MOF with queries to be worked out. Physical conditions of the files and its contents were also observed.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Issues that are discussed under this data presentation and discussion section are organised as follows:

- Personal Records Creation and Management;
- Accuracy and completeness of files;
- Cases of misplacement of files;
- Cases of file loss;
- Training and skills in Records Management; and
- Problems of Management of Personal Records.

(i) Personal Records Creation and Management

Personal records are created and managed by the ministry or government department where an employee is employed. This process starts right from the first day an individual is employed by letter of employment. The file grows with time, and when an employee retires, it is sent to the Ministry of Finance for payment of pension benefits. The problem observed however, is that the files are sent with some records missing and others inaccurate.

The registry clerks in the Pension Registry Unit of the Ministry of Finance were asked to comment on whether they have encountered cases of incomplete records in files received from the ministries. They all confirmed in the affirmative that they have encountered incomplete records. Some documents missing in the files were:

- Letters of first appointment;
- Letters of promotion;
- Letters of confirmation;
- Passport photographs; and
- Retiring award forms.

Unfortunately, the missing records are so vital that Action Officers cannot process pension payments without having access to them. These are records that are supposed to be created by the employers and copies given to the employees for their references. The loss of these records gives an indication that they were either not created by the employers or mismanaged when the employees were still working. This gives an impression that Action Officers cannot work without such vital records and therefore cause delays as the records have to be traced by consulting employers through letters, phone calls or invite employees to provide such records.

(ii) Accuracy and Completeness of Files

Action Officers were asked to comment on the accuracy and completeness of files. All of them (100%) said that they checked for accuracy and completeness of files before they were taken for pension claims. All of them also agreed that they encounter files that are incomplete with some vital information missing. To alleviate the problem, they consult the pensioners themselves.

An interview with the Pension Accountant in MAFS, however, revealed a different opinion. She said:

Yes! Action Officers have not been doing their job carefully. I have been receiving a number of files that are incomplete and what I have been doing is to return the files to them to repeat re-checking the completeness of the files.

The movement of files to and fro is one of the reasons that cause delays in the payment of the pensioners.

(iii) Cases of Misplaced Files

One of the areas that the research investigated was the loss and misplacement of files. When registry clerks were asked whether they had encountered cases of misplacement of files, their responses were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Cases of misplaced files

Category	Registry: Min. Agriculture (N = 12)		Registry: PSM (N = 10)		Total (N = 22)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	11	92	10	100	21	96
No	1	8	-	-	1	4
Total	12	100	10	100	22	100

Source: Field Survey, 2005/2006

Table 2 shows that 21 (96%) of the respondents agreed that there was misplacement of files while one (4%) responded that there was no misplacement of files. The responses signal a problem in handling files and the effectiveness of the file movement record book. An effective file movement record book would have reduced the problem of loss of files, which is not the case here.

(iv) Cases of Lost Files

With regard to total loss of files, the registry clerks and clients were asked whether or not they have encountered cases of lost files. The responses are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Cases of lost files

Category	Min. Agr. (N=12)		Min. Finance (N=6)		PO- PSM (N=10)		Clients (N=18)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Yes	12	100	6	100	8	80	8	44
No	-	-	-	-	2	20	10	56
Total	12	100	100	100	10	100	18	100

Source: Field Survey, 2005/2006

Table 3 shows that all 12 (100 %) registry clerks in the Ministry of Agriculture, six (80%) in the Ministry of Finance and eight (80%) in the PO- PSM as well as eight (44%) clients have experienced incidents of file loss in the registry. Although two (20%) of the clerks in the PO- PSM and 10(56%) of the clients said their files never got lost during their employment period, the trend of the responses indicates that the problem of file loss exists. Loss of files definitely has a negative impact on the processing of payments to the pensioners. Once the official records cannot be found, the officers will have no basis for processing payments.

Five Action Officers were asked to comment on reasons for misfiling and loss of files. Four of them (80%) said that ignorance on the part of the registry clerks of the importance of records was the main reason. Three (60%) said lack of skills and knowledge of records management was a factor while another three (60%) attributed misfiling and loss of files to carelessness among registry clerks.

Misfiling of records is a factor that caused problems in tracing pensioners' files. The causes of misfiling were mentioned as lack of skills and knowledge in managing records among records clerks, ignorance of the importance of records and carelessness among registry clerks.

The research also investigated the physical condition of the personal files. This was mainly done by the researchers themselves through the observation method. The physical condition of the files was basically in a chaotic state as they have been used since the employees were employed some thirty or so years ago. Most of them were the original files that had not been changed. Wear and tear was a common feature in most of the files.

(v) Training and Skills in Records Management

The researchers were also interested in determining the level of training and records management skills possessed by registry clerks. It was found out that of the 27 registry clerks involved in the study, 11 (44%) were primary school leavers while 12 (48%) were secondary school leavers.

In terms of the level of training in records management, only one had a Diploma in Records Management. Fourteen had certificates in Records Management and four had attended seminars/ courses. The remaining eight had no training of any kind as indicated in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Level of Training in Records Management

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Diploma in Records management	1	3.7
Certificate in Records Management	14	51.9
Short Courses	4	14.8
No training at all	8	29.6
Total Number of Respondents	27	100

Source: Field Survey, 2005/2006

In such a situation, it is no wonder the incidence of misfiling and loss of files are experienced in records keeping. Low level formal education coupled with lack of professional training is likely to result in such problems.

It was also learnt from the research that there was no consideration of providing any training or even refresher courses to Action Officers on records management. In this regard, it can be argued that slits seen in the process of records creation and management on the part of Action Offices may be contributed by this gap.

When a cross tabulation was made between “Training in Records Management” and “Ability to Work with Filing System”, it was revealed that there is a significant association between the two variables. Respondents showed that 85% of those trained could work effectively with the filing system whereas 89% of the untrained ones could not work satisfactorily with the filing systems. This is an indication that lack of training among registry clerks is one of the causes of poor management of records.

Problems of Management of Personal Records

The research came out with the following problems associated with the management of personal records:

(i) Lack of Records Management Policy

An effective organization requires a well established policy upon which clear objectives, responsibilities and resources to administer the records including training will be based. The study found out that the problems associated with records management in Tanzania are partly

contributed to by inadequacies in the Records Management Act of 2002. This Act repealed the 1931 Tanzania Records Disposal Ordinance Cap 9, the 1965 National Archives Act No. 33 and the Presidential Circular No. 7 of 1963 on the care and disposal of public records. It was noted here that the 2002 Act is silent on the integration and function of current and semi current records management and also on the formation of effective and relevant records management policies. This has resulted in institutions and government offices operating without records management programmes.

(ii) Poor and Inadequate Facilities

Twenty one (75%) out of 33 registry clerks admitted that registry rooms were too small and could not accommodate the ever increasing personal files. This situation forced some of the files to be arranged on the floor, thus exposing the records to possible wetting due to moisture from the floor as well as complicating the process of file retrieval.

(iii) Lack of Knowledge and Skills

Lack of knowledge and skills on how to manage records professionally is a phenomenon that was commonly noted. Although 18 (64%) of the registry clerks responded that they had training in records management, 10 (36%) never attended any training as noted earlier. It is from this observation that lack of professionalism in records management is professed as the most fundamental problem plaguing registries in most ministries and departments.

(iv) Lack of Support from Management

Lack of support from management was another problem facing the management of records. Four (67%) respondents from the pension registry in the Ministry of Finance, seven (58%) from Ministry of Agriculture and three (60%) Action Officers revealed that there was little attention given to registries by management. This was perceptible from the inadequacy of funds for records management units. Apart from funds, even showing interest in these units was a problem. An interview with the Principal Human Resources Development Officer in the MAFS for example, revealed that only six million T Shillings was allocated for the Records Management Unit. According to him, "this amount is too small to meet the basic needs of the unit."

(v) Lack of Awareness on the Importance of Records Management

Management of records is basically considered as the duty of records clerks, although it involves many people. Lack of awareness on the importance of records greatly affects the efforts in improving records management in ministries and departments. The importance of a record is appreciated when one does not have access to it at a time when one wants a piece of information for decision-making.

Conclusion

The findings of the study have indicated that despite efforts made by the President's Office in improving records management in public offices, personal records management has remained unsatisfactory. The implications of this state of affairs have been manifested in poor quality of service delivery by government offices, but notably in the payment of pension benefits to retired public servants.

There has been a persistent delay in the payment of the benefits to the extent that some pensioners have died in the process without getting their benefits. For those who have managed to get paid, the process has taken so long rendering the whole exercise very costly and tiring. Retirees from the upcountry regions have come to the Ministry of Finance Headquarters in Dar es Salaam seeking their benefits. In so doing, they have encountered a number of social and economic problems which could have been avoided if the records management system was effectively and efficiently set up.

Recommendations

In the light of the above, the study recommends the following measures to be taken to improve records management situation not only in Tanzania but also in other developing countries where such problems are also likely to exist:

(i) Records Management Policy

The existence of a records management policy would provide clear guidelines in terms of responsibilities, resources management and staff training. Other areas to be dealt with in the policy are regular internal monitoring and evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness of records management practices. A records management policy would generally provide guidelines on principles and practices governing the overall management of public records right from their creation stage to disposal.

(ii) Improved Facilities

The issue of superior and adequate facilities was also important in this study. The size of registry rooms, working gears like aprons, dust protection gears, as well as improving the morale of workers need to be looked into. Equally important is the quality and security of the files.

(iii) Training

One of the most serious problems revealed in the study was lack of knowledge and skills in managing records professionally which was contributed by the dearth of training among the custodians of records. To alleviate this problem, training can be done in several ways: First, efforts should be made to ensure that those who have not been trained in records management from a recognised institution are given the opportunity to do so. Secondly, by developing in-house training programmes where the trained staff can also train the untrained ones in the basics of records management. Thirdly, the staff should be given opportunities to attend short courses, seminars, conferences and workshops as a form of continuous training programmes.

In addition to these efforts, the President's Office can organize a special client-tailored training in the form of "Crash programme" for government registry clerks. The School of Library and Information Studies, University of Tanzania for example, can be commissioned to run the programme. This option is simple and cost effective.

(iv) Computerization of Personal Records

It was observed that records in all the ministries and agencies that were visited are handled manually. All records were in paper format which make them difficult to manage. Adoption of ICT

in managing the records is recommended as it would improve efficiency of managing records in varied ways. This is through storage of vital records in electronic form that would speed up retrieval of records and even facilitate transfer and sharing of personal files. The purchase of computers including the relevant software and staff training to manage the records that would now be managed through the use of computer is suggested.

It should be noted that this is not an absolutely new recommendation to the government. The Management Information System's component of the Public Service Reform Programme (2000-2015) had its sub-component on Records Management focused on the improvement of quality and availability of information within the civil service. The programme provides a foundation for introducing computerization of public records in all government departments over time. This initiative is recognised and therefore needs to be fully exploited.

(v) Need for Employees' Master File

The findings of the study established that there are several problems associated with management of employees who have been transferred from one ministry or government department to the other. Files or data sheets are in some cases not released to organizations when the employees are transferred or the files get lost along the line. Such problems can be solved by generating one master file for all employees. This will enable employees to move from one ministry/department to another with their files and nothing left behind for possible mismanagement.

(vi) Autonomy of Records Management Units

It was evident from the study that poor records management in the public sector is deeply rooted in the way records management units stand in the organizational structures of the ministries and government departments. Records management is under the administration department which has numerous obligations and so has been rendered ineffective. As a result of this arrangement, records management units have in many cases been neglected. Plans for changing the status quo depend on the understanding and willingness of the administration. Thus, it is suggested that records management units stand on their own as independent units with a director, handling their own plans, budgets and decisions.

It is a combination of these suggestions that will improve the management of records in government offices. This in turn will assist in timely and accurate provision of information for retirees and hopefully, alleviate the problems that they are currently facing in struggling for their retirement benefits.

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