Records management for administration of Traditional Council at Ga-Mphahlele in Limpopo, South Africa

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Abstract

Records management seems to be a problem in traditional councils, and this hinders their effective administration. Proper records management is central to effective administration in all organisations, including traditional offices. Records are also necessary for evaluating organisational performance and supporting business functions. The purpose of this study was to investigate records management to support effective administration at Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council. The study used a qualitative research approach and a case study research design. The study had a population of 57 council members. The researcher used quota sampling to sample the population of Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council staff. The researcher interviewed 12 participants which made up a quota sample of the population. Data was collected in face-to-face interviews with the council members at Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council using a semi-structured interview. The collected data was analysed thematically. The study revealed that the staff members did not have a clear understanding of the role of records management in achieving effective administration. The study further revealed that the traditional council did not have enough records management resources, and they were still using the old and manual way of managing records. Using old ways was problematic when it came to retrieving records for the administration of the traditional council. The study recommended that traditional councils must train their records management staff and offer workshops and seminars to instruct them in records management as this will give them a clear understanding of the of records management in achieving effective administration of the traditional council. The study also recommended that traditional councils should allocate more records management resources like computers, scanners and funds so they would be able to have proper records management and use these records to support effective administration in the traditional council.

Keywords: records management; administration; resources; Ga-Mphahlele; Traditional council, Limpopo, South Africa

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1. Introduction and motivation

Records are necessary for evaluating organisational performance and supporting business functions. Records are precious assets that should be controlled and preserved. In many countries, governments are the primary source and consumer of information found within records (Heeks 2000:197; Ngulube 2001:1). According to Chibambo (2006:10) and Lipchak (2002:3), records serve as a standard for predicting existing and future government actions and activities. Traditional councils also have records that aid in the administration of the council and predict the existence and future of the council. Records play a vital role in society by giving proof and information about the actions of persons and organisations. These records are also important when it comes to the administration of the organisation; hence they need to be preserved. Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council has a lot of records, but because of poor management, they get lost, which delays the effective administration of the council.

Traditional councils have existed in modern-day Africa, as they have across the world long before the existence of colonialism. Crook (2005:1) defines traditional councils as all forms of political and social authority that originated in precolonial governments and civilisations. The Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council continues to use beads and different soil colours to decorate the walls of mud homes. Conversely, they use modern equipment such as notebooks and pens with ballpoint nibs to generate papers, which must be maintained. Administrative functions, such as record keeping, are typically allocated to members of traditional councils, sometimes known as "secretaries". As a result, managing and administering records present several challenges such as inadequate records management skills. Traditional councils are experiencing a big problem when it comes to using records to archive effective administration because most of the records are lost and some are disposed of before time in a state of preserving them for future purposes.

2. Problem statement

The problem for this study originated from the realisation that the Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council does not comply with the records management standards of other traditional councils. The gap is linked to poor records management, which hinders the Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council's progress. Previous studies showed that Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council's administration is ineffective partly because of a lack of proper records management. Molepo and Cloete (2017) argue that traditional councils must ensure adequate record keeping to remain relevant in a changing political context. Ineffectively handled records are at risk of loss, which jeopardises organisational administration. Asogwa (2012) emphasises that well-managed records are critical assets that help individuals and organisations achieve their goals. The management of records at Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council should be improved for effective administration, as, without proper records, the administration will be negatively affected.

3. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate records management for administration of Traditional Council at Ga-Mphahlele in Limpopo, South Africa.

4. Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To establish the role of records management in achieving effective administration within the traditional council.
- To determine the existence of records management resources in achieving effective administration in the traditional council.

5. Literature review

This section presents literature review for the study.

5.1 The role of records management in achieving effective administration within the traditional council

Traditional councils have a role to provide effective administration services to the constituency it serves within its jurisdiction. According to Mosweu and Rakemane (2020:16), proper records management is central to the promotion of good administration. Residents frequently complain about the length of time and expense it takes to obtain official papers, such as proof of residence, from the traditional council. Moreover, some of these do not even provide receipts for interactions involving residents' funds. Records management is a field and organisational function that manages records to fulfil operational company demands, accountability standards and public standards (Taylor 1996:11). The ISO 15489 Standard on Records Management (International Organisation for Standardization 2016) defines a record as information created, received and maintained as evidence, and as an asset by an organisation or a person, in pursuit of legal obligations or in the transaction of business. Blake (2005:74) lists the benefits of effective records management as promoting efficient collaboration and information exchange, providing evidence-based policymaking, assisting in the administration of privacy regulations and ensuring the successful execution of freedom of information and other laws through good record business. Other advantages include improved accountability through the provision of trustworthy records of activities and decisions, as well as knowledge management across government sectors through the availability of reliable information for sharing, extraction and summarising. According to Keorapetse and Keakopa (2012), it is difficult to hold authorities accountable for their wrongdoings owing to the inaccessibility of documents caused by massive backlogs of not using current records, which, over time, destroyed records-keeping systems across Africa.

According to Mutula and Wamukoya (2009), records are precious assets that must be handled and preserved. The findings of a study by Yuba (2013) revealed that one of the primary causes of the ineffectiveness of the South African government is that records have not been properly maintained, and administrative systems and procedures rely greatly on a robust record management framework. Molepo and Cloete (2017) argue that traditional councils must ensure adequate record keeping to remain relevant in a changing political context. Records are also necessary for evaluating organisational performance and supporting business functions. It is lamented that governments cannot efficiently manage public expenditures, civil service or service delivery such as education and health care without accurate data. More generally, poor record management can also result in a reduction in the quality of services provided to businesses. For instance, responses to written requests for business registration, licence issuance and other items required for enterprises to pursue their

commercial interests may be delayed (Mutula & Wamukoya 2009). Furthermore, traditional councils manage public expenditure and service delivery of the community. This requires proper records management of every important record for future reference, and effective and transparent administration of the traditional council. Good records management practices must be the benchmark for traditional councils to achieve not just efficient administration, but also efficient delivery of services and accountability (Chaterera 2016). Traditional councils must have proper records management, as it is very important for administration, and to have this, they need to invest funding and through supplying necessary resources.

5.2 Records management resources in support of effective administration

Records management is key to public sector management. Poor records management is a significant cause of bad audits in South Africa (Ngoepe 2012:86), as one method of ensuring responsibility in the management of resources is auditing. Ngoepe and Ngulube (2013:6) state that good records management is one of the important enablers for the auditing process after acknowledging the importance of records management in the audit process in the context of South Africa. In a study by Nyamwamu (2018) on records management practices in the administration of public institutions in Kenya, the findings revealed inadequate staff training, a lack of skills for effective records management and negligence of the health and safety of records management staff given the vulnerability of tasks involved such as working with dusty files. Thus, the organisation should put in place mechanisms such as setting aside enough financial resources for staff training and ensuring staff health. The study recommended that all organisations, including Kenya, should recognise the critical role of their records management segment and set aside sufficient resources such as finances and space for effective records. Bakare, Abioye and Issa (2016:59) assessed records management practices in specific local government councils in Nigeria. Part of the study objectives was to find out which challenges were face regarding effective records management in government organisations. In their findings, they identified factors such as inadequate finances, poor maintenance culture, a lack of materials and equipment and unfavourable climatic conditions as barriers to effective records management practices in the country. Other factors included a lack of a management plan, inadequate storage facilities, erratic power supply and a lack of skilled employees. As a result of these findings, Bakare et al. (2016:60) recommend that organisations should provide adequate funds for the records management programmes in government organisations. They support their recommendations by arguing that adequate finances are significant in procuring adequate and modern storage facilities and equipment to mitigate challenges faced in the records management departments.

Professor Patrick Ngulube of the University of South Africa delivered a keynote lecture at the Archives and Records Management Conference in Botswana, urging governments to use records to support effective governance through collaborations to build Africa (Shone 2019). Records management helps to ensure that public administration runs smoothly (Klareld 2015). Access to documents is crucial for maintaining openness in public administration (De Mingo & Cerrillo-i-Martínez 2018). These records need to be preserved so that even in the future, the traditional councils can still go back and refer to the original records. However, the nation lacks some of the supplies and machinery required to establish viable records management programmes in traditional councils. Traditional councils, according to Masuke (2010), struggle to obtain financing from financial institutions and government agencies because they struggle to manage accounting records and yearly financial accounts. When seeking financial aid, traditional councils' lack of effective record keeping practice is a

hindrance. Most traditional councils disregard appropriate record management procedures, even though it is critical for their success and sustainability.

In a study on preserving public electronic information for the sustainability of e-governance in sub-Saharan Africa, Ngulube (2018) found that most of the infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa is insufficient for acquiring, maintaining and keeping digital records, including those on social media. Lowry (2012) also states that in Tanzania, the departments and organisations responsible for generating the electronic records lacked the resources required to sustain and maintain them over time. Infrastructure is the greatest challenge in transitioning from a manual to an electronic era alters the records' life cycle from birth to disposal (Netshakhuma 2019). The staff in the traditional council still need to be trained in the skills of managing electronic records; therefore, the traditional council needs to fund the programmes of training and buy the necessary resources like computers, printers and scanners for this programme.

6. Methodology

Govender (2018:359) characterises the research method as "the entire nature of the procedures that are carried out in the research." This study employed the qualitative research method with a case study research design. This design is mostly used in qualitative research, where the researcher focuses on a single entity or unit, which he or she then studies intensively, collecting as much relevant information as possible, and thereafter making correct inferences (Creswell & Creswell 2018). In the study, the researcher employed a descriptive case study research design, which is used when a study's "how" & "why" questions must be answered (Baxter & Jacks 2008). The council members of Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council in the Limpopo province made up the study's population. The target participants for the research were council members responsible for records in the traditional council. Preliminary investigations revealed that these members totalled 57, including the chief of Ga-Mphahlele. Accordingly, quota sampling was used in the research project because the number of council members was small. The researcher sampled 14 participants for the interview, which made up a quota of the population. Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013) explain that quota sampling is a type of non-probability sampling like stratified sampling, but it relies on convenience rather than random selection. The researcher used quota sampling to determine the specific categories of individuals to be sampled and the required number (quotas) within these groups. Consequently, sampling was conducted at a convenient time until the quotas were fulfilled. Of the 14 sampled participants, two withdrew from the study. The researchers had to respect their decision and only 12 participants were interviewed. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Limpopo Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee (TREC). Data was collected from the council members at the Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council using a semi-structured interview. Data were examined using thematic analysis. An approach for identifying, analysing, organising, summarising and reporting themes identified in a set of data is known thematic analysis. To ensure that the findings were correct and verifiable, the researcher used qualitative criteria. The researcher assessed credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability while applying qualitative criteria. The researchers conducted the study using scientific research methods and ensured that the data provided by the participants were reported accurately and adequately. More importantly, the researchers consulted with the supervisor and submitted the document for review by an external research examiner to verify whether it adhered to the coded categories used in the study, which avoided subjective bias. Before the final administration of data collection, the researcher pre-tested the data-gathering equipment at Ga-Mphahlele

Traditional Council with people who were not part of the research population to check feasibility.

7. Presentation of results and discussion

This section presents the findings of the study.

7.1 The role of records management in achieving effective administration within the traditional council

Participants were asked what the role of records management was in achieving effective administration of Ga-Mphahlele Traditional Council. The findings showed that the staff members did not have a clear understanding of the role of records management in achieving effective administration. This was shown when the participants mentioned only one purpose, which was to keep the records safe. Specific responses were as follows:

Participant B: *"The role is for the records to be safe and then we be able to manage the traditional affairs using the records and referring to them."*

Participant C: *"The most important role of records management. Is for all the records which are created or have to do with the traditional council have to be kept in a very safe place, for example in the strong room, so that if anything happens; for example, the traditional council got burned, these records will still be safe, and we will be able to have a way forward and have a proper administration."*

The findings revealed that the staff members did not have a clear understanding of the role of records management in achieving effective administration. All the participants mentioned only one role of records management. This affected the administration of the traditional council because the records were not used effectively. These findings resonated with those of Tsabedze (2011) who discovered that workers nominated to the role of register officer in Swaziland were not sufficiently educated in records administration and hence could not be trusted with keeping government data during their entire lifespan. According to Nevhutalu (2016), poor training of register officials in municipalities impedes the improvement of records management procedures. Similarly, a study by Nyamwamu (2018) revealed that inadequate staff training and a lack of skills for effective records management are the reasons for poor records management practices in organisations.

7.2 Records management resources

Participants were also asked what resources were used for records management to achieve effective administration of the traditional council. The findings from the interviews showed that the traditional council did not have sufficient records management resources to achieve effective administration of the traditional council. The resources used in the traditional council were not enough and some were too old to be used for records management. The following were some of the comments from the participants.

Participant E: *"We still need to get computers. For example, in the next five years, we want to make sure that people can have computers, all of them, so that they can no longer say they've lost their information or misplaced it. We also need to have an increase in funds. This will help in the administration of the Traditional Council."*

Participant D: *"We need more resources on how to file information and stop using papers only. We need more hard drives. We need more proper files and a safe working environment for our records so that when we need to refer to these records for the growth of the council it will be easy to access them."*

The findings of the study revealed that the traditional council was still using the old, manual way of managing records. This was shown when participants said they needed computers to save the records rather than using paper-based records. Using old ways was problematic when it came to recovering records for the administration of the traditional council. In some cases, the traditional council cannot give full records to the auditors for auditing. The council members mentioned that the traditional council was planning to get more resources and funding, which would make proper records management and effective administration of the traditional council easier. To support the findings of the study reported on this paper, the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (2007) states that municipalities should ensure that they budget for the records management programmes and that the necessary financial, human and technological resources are allocated to support the records management programme. Makgahlela (2021) also state that for municipalities to develop effective and sustainable records management programmes, there should be clear funding arrangements. The records management finances are very important when it comes to the effective administration of the traditional council because, without proper records management resources, there is no effective administration. Having relevant resources will lead to effective administration and offer a good corporate social-historical and cultural memory.

8.   Conclusion

Records management is integral to the functioning of any business, as it enables the control of one of the most important resources in any organisation. As traditional councils continue to serve as custodians of tradition and governance, the role of records management remains paramount in achieving their goals and aspirations. The staff members did not have a clear understanding of the role of records management in achieving effective administration. The participants did not have a good understanding of the role of records management, all they knew was that records had to be kept safe. They did have records, but they did not know how to use these records to achieve an effective administration of the traditional council. They were still using the old, manual way of managing records; which is problematic when it comes to recovering records for the administration of the traditional council. In some cases, the traditional could not give full records to the auditors for auditing. The council members mentioned that the traditional council was planning to get more resources, which would make it easier to have proper records management and effective administration of its operations. Given the foregoing, management resources which include financing, are required for appropriate records management to achieve successful administration.

9.   Recommendations

Poor records management in many organisations can be attributed to the incompetence of staff and a lack of required skills from performing their duties effectively. The researcher recommends that traditional councils must train their records management staff to achieve a records management certification. Moreover, the council should offer workshops and seminars to instruct workers in records management, which would give them a clear

understanding of the role of records management in achieving effective administration of the traditional council. Having well-trained staff will also avoid records being lost and the traditional council will be at the same standard and level as other traditional councils. Additionally, all traditional council staff should attend workshops on records management policy and procedure to make sure that records are regulated from the creation stage and to prevent unlawful removal and destruction of the records. Records become active from the creation/initial stage; therefore, they are crucial to the administration of the traditional council. In addition, provision of adequate funds for the management of records is essential for successful implementation. The researchers further recommend that the traditional council should allocate more records management resources like computers, scanners and funds to enable them to have proper records management and use these records to achieve effective administration in the traditional council. The top management in the traditional council should also support all the programmes of records management and buy them computers, binding machines and more papers, and give high security to these records so they have well-managed records to achieve effective administration of the traditional council. The council should acquire a new system of records management to enable them to save space; if not, they should have an off-site storage for old records to be kept in good state until disposal.

Declarations

- The manuscript has not been previously published and is not under consideration for publication with any other journal or copyrighted publishing platform of any kind.
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- Manuscript and study meet all the ethical requirements of the journal and that of my institution or company, as well as legal requirements of the study country.
- There is not any potential conflict of interest for the research.
- All authors are familiar with the content of this manuscript and gave consent to co-publish.
- All authors contributed to the writing of the article manuscript.
- Authors take responsibility to keep participants' information confidential as required by legislation, including the Protection of Personal information Act.
- Authors gives consent to the Journal of South African Society of Archivist to publish the manuscript.

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