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PROSPECTS OF RECORD MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

In an organization, records constitute corporate memory which supplement human memory and serve as guides to decision making and effective planning. Records are valuable to organizations because resort to human memory is not a method of producing the picture of what actually took place. This point is readily apparent when we ask a number of persons to observe a scene and report their observations individually. The result is most likely to reveal that each person's memory of the event is different. Given a time lag before the question is repeated, each individual's recollection of the scene may differ still, from their earlier report. The prospect of relying on human memory is even more dismal when we consider the point that the value of information obtained from such a source diminishes as it is transmitted from person to person and from generation to generation.To take advantage of past experiences, accurate records and good records keeping are a necessary prologue to planning for the future. Records therefore constitute an essential tool of administration without which operational processes and functions cannot be performed in organizations. The importance of records is underscored by the fact that a significant percentage of organizations' budgets are spent directly or indirectly on the resource. Despite the indispensable value of records, however, proper management of records that will lead to economy and efficiency in their creation, use and maintenance is seldom considered by many organizations.This paper therefore discusses the processes and essence of keeping records

Keywords: Records Management, Record keeping-NIGERIA,Documentation, Nigeria

NATURE OF MODERN RECORDS

Public records have grown tremendously in volume in the last century and a half. Their growth in volume corresponds fairly closely to the increase in human population since the middle of the 18th century. If this population increase were traced graphically from the beginning of history, it could be represented by nearly horizontal line, rising almost imperceptibly through the centuries but turning sharply upward in the last century and a half. The population increase is partly attributable to technological developments that have made possible an astounding production of the materials needed for human existence. The population increase, in turn, has made necessary an expansion of governmental activity; and this expansion has had its effect its record production. As modern technological methods have come to be applied to the production of records, their growth, in the last several decades, has been in a geometric, rather than an arithmetical ratio.

Yet while the use of modern record-making devices, such as the typewriter and other duplicating machines, have made possible an enormous proliferation of records., the reasons for their production, it should be emphasized, are inherent in the character of modern governments. Man does not make records just because he has machines to produce them. They are produced mainly as a byproduct in the performance of work, and the rate of their production is usually increased by an expansion of activity. This fact may be illustrated by the experience of the Federal government of the United States which has unquestionably produced more records than any other modern government, and very likely more than all other modern governments combined. The expansion of its activities, particularly during periods of emergency, resulted in tremendous increases in records. The volume created between its establishment and the Civil War (1861) was about a hundred thousand cubic feet; between the Civil War and the First World War, about a million and a half cubic feet; and between the First World War and the economic depression,

about three and a half million cubic feet. During the decade of the 1930's, when the government was concerned with the economic depression, and with preparation for another world war, another ten million cubic feet were added. During the Second World War production reached the rate of two million cubic feet per year, a rate which has even been exceeded since then.

The volume of public records produced in a country is also determined by the way its government agencies use records in their business. This point may be illustrated by comparing the record situation in the United States with that in other countries. File rooms, which are the nearest American equivalent of European registry offices, are found in most government agencies in the United States; but they seldom succeed in achieving the rigid control over records that is achieved by their European counterparts; and often they are unable to prevent the establishment of considerable files in subordinate government offices. In recent times, as the progressive steps of a transaction are taken by various offices of an agency, each office usually develops and maintains a separate record on it. This practice probably accounts in large measure for the fact that the Federal government in 1954 had about 23,000,000 cubic feet of records in its various agencies. In England in the same year, according to a report of a Committee on Departmental Records, only 600,000 linear feet of preservable materials were found in the English departments. This difference in volume of records far exceeds the difference in size between the two governments.

As records increase in volume, they also become more complex. The complexity of Federal records in the United States is due, in large part, to the complexity of the government that created them. In the executive branch of the government a pyramid-like structure has arisen, with its apex in the offices of the President and its base in a multitude of field offices. This structure has been made more complex in its organization and functioning by certain characteristics that are

inherent in the American form of government; e.g., the system of checks and balances under which the legislative branch reviews the functioning of the executive; and the two-party system, under which governmental organization is responsive, to a degree at least, to periodic changes of program and policy. In general, as governmental activities are expanded, they become more highly specialized; and as they become specialized, the records pertaining to them become complex.

The complexity of modern public records, however, is also partly attributable to the way they are kept. For the most part they are kept in a haphazard manner. In the United States, for example, Federal records are arranged under a variety of systems, and occasionally are simply accumulated without system. The earliest American filing systems were quite simple and corresponded somewhat to the registry systems used in Europe during the same period. Gradually, however, the simple alphabetical and numerical systems were replaced by more complicated systems—the Dewey-decimal, the subject-numeric, duplex-numeric, and others. Each agency or office adopted the system of its preference so that there was no uniformity of system from agency to agency 'or, within agency, from office to office. Nor was there any uniformity in the ways in which the different systems were applied.

RECORD MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

The objectives in managing public records are to make the records serve the purposes for which they were created as cheaply and effectively as possible, and to make a proper disposition of them after they have served those purposes. Records are efficiently managed if they can be found quickly and without fuss or bother when they are needed, if they are kept at a minimum charge for space and maintenance while they are needed for current business, and if none are kept longer than they are needed for such business unless they have a continuing value

for purposes of research or for other purposes. The objectives of efficient record management can be achieved only if attention is paid to the handling of records from the time they are created until the time when they are released to an archival institution or disposed of.

Record management is thus concerned with the whole life span of most records. It strives to limit their creation, and for this reason one finds "birth control" advocates in the, record management field as well as in the field of human genetics. It exercises a partial control over their current use. And it assists in determining which of them should be consigned to the "hell" of the incinerator or the "heaven" of an archival institution, or, if perchance, they should first be held for a time in the "purgatory" or "limbo" of a record center.

The most important aspect of record management relates to the use of records for the conduct of governmental operations. Little is done within government that is not made a matter of record. Both the top level administrators, who are concerned with major programs, and the lowly clerks, who are concerned with routine transactions, need records in their work. The kind of records needed by the two may be different but records are as important at the top as at the bottom of the administrative ladder. At the top, records provide both initial stimulus and background information for executive decisions. On every problem that is considered documents will be assembled from many sources and of many types– correspondence, memoranda, and the like in which the problem is initially stated; statistical tabulations and analyses, performance and accomplishment reports, narrative reports, and the like that contain the information needed for making decisions; circulars, memoranda, and other procedural and policy directives that serve as means of administrative control; selected records of past actions that serve as precedents giving consistency to the processes of government. At the level of operations in which most governmental work is actually done—in which the

transactions relating to specific persons, or corporate bodies, or subjects are actually performed—records are needed to transmit from above the policies and procedures that are to be followed, and from below the reports of accomplishment and performance, and to record all phases of the government's dealings with the particular parties involved in its transactions. The most difficult task of record management relates to the most valuable records, The more important, or valuable, records are, the more difficult it is to manage them.

As a rule, the most valuable records are those that pertain to the origins, the organizational and functional developments, and the major programs of an agency. They relate to the direction rather than to the execution of government functions. They are often not so complete as records on unimportant matters. It is a curious anomaly that the more important a matter, the less likely is a complete documentation of it to be found. While modern technology has aided the making and keeping of records in many ways, it has also made unnecessary the production of many documents that once would have become part of the record of government action. Much that influences the development of policies and programs never makes its way into formal H voids. Important matters may be handled orally in conferences or by telephone, an instrument that has been referred to by Paul Hasluck, Australian Minister for Territories, as the "great robber of history.

Important records are difficult to classify for current use. Policy records cannot always be identified as such when they are first created. Policies arise in respect to particular transactions, and so the records pertaining to them may be interfiled with others of no lasting moment on the transactions with which they were initially associated. Records on policy and procedural matters—on general as distinct from specific matters—are difficult to assemble, to organize into recognizable file units, and to identify in such a way that their significance will be

made known. Records of routine operations, on the other hand, are easily classified.

Important records are difficult to retire after their current uses have been exhausted. Important records on policy and procedure do not become obsolete, or noncurrent, as soon as the transactions in connection with which they may have been made are completed. The policies and procedures they establish often continue in effect. And even if those policies and procedures are superseded, the records of them serve to explain and give meaning to the change. Such records are thus difficult to retire because the period of their administrative utility is difficult to establish. Records evidencing only the execution of policies and procedures, on the other hand, become noncurrent when all likely actions in the particular case have been taken. The termination of routine actions is usually definite and clear. Important records, moreover, are difficult to assemble for preservation in an archival institution because many of them must first be segregated from a mass of trivia in which they may have been submerged. And this segregation commonly has to be made after the records have lost their significance for current operations and their identity has become obscured.

NATURE OF ORGANIZATION OF RECORDS

The efficient management of public records is of major importance to government, and a government's efficiency can often be measured by the efficiency with which its records are managed.   Public officials, even at the top level of administration, have a stake in record management, for every refinement in record management has its influence on functioning. Record management activities are of a highly specialized type, requiring specialized competencies and a specialized background of experience,   In every large and   complicated government, therefore, a special staff should exist somewhere in its administrative

hierarchy to concern itself exclusively with providing leadership for all agencies in their handling of record problems. The placement of such a staff in a governmental structure, its size, and the character of its activities are determined by the size, complexity, and organization of the government it serves. Whenever possible the specialized staff should be attached to a staff agency, that is, one that has jurisdiction in certain matters over all other agencies of the government. These matters usually embrace budgetary, personnel, and facilitative operations, such as the procurement of supplies and the provision of space. The record management staff should thus be attached either to an office concerned with budgetary matters for the government as a whole, to one concerned with personnel matters for the government as a whole, or to one concerned with facilitative matters for the government as a whole. It should not be attached to s line agency that is coordinate with other line agencies.   In a word, officials of one department or ministry should not be in a position to tell officials of another how they should keep their records. In the Federal government of the United States, the National Archives and Records Service is part of the General Services Administration, a staff agency that has government wide responsibilities with respect to buildings, supplies, records, and the procurement of critical war items.   In the Commonwealth government of Australia, the Public Service Board, which has government wide jurisdiction over personnel matters, is   concerned also with the record management program.   A similar arrangement exists in New Zealand.

The authority of the central record management staff may range all the way from simple inspection to complete regulation of the record work of line agencies. This range of authority is partially illustrated in the statutory provisions relating to the management of records in the United States. In the basic act of June 19, 1934, under which it was established, the National Archives was given "full power to inspect" and limited power to requisition records of all Federal agencies. The

Federal Records Act of 1950, which superseded the basic act, did not refer to the requisitioning power, since the classes of records that were subject to requisition had been transferred to the National Archives Building in the period intervening between the two statutes. The new Act, instead, focused attention on the management of records within Federal agencies. It made agency heads chiefly responsible for the establishment of "effective controls over the creation, maintenance, and use of records in the conduct of current business." It vested in the head of the central staff agency concerned with record management (1) the power of inspection, which was contained in the National Archives Act,

(2) the power of regulating interagency transfers of records,

(3) the power to formulate "standards, procedures, and techniques designed to improve the management of records, to insure the maintenance and security of records deemed appropriate for preservation, and to facilitate the segregation and disposal of records of temporary value," (4) the power to "establish standards for the selective retention of records of continuing value and [to] assist Federal agencies in applying such standards to records in their custody," and (5) the power to "establish, maintain, and operate records centers for the storage, processing, and servicing of records for Federal agencies pending their deposit with the National Archives of the United States or their disposition in any other manner authorized by law." While the adoption of centrally developed standards, procedures, and techniques of managing current records was not made mandatory, Federal agencies were required to cooperate in applying them.

In the field of controlling the production and maintenance of records, the functions of the central record management staff should be largely analytical and promotional. A central staff can obtain information on the methods and techniques of record making and keeping that are fallowed in various government agencies, thus becoming a repository of such information for the entire government. It can

analyze the information to determine which methods and techniques are the most effective, which are generally applicable, and which are applicable only under particular circumstances. It can make case studies of effective techniques and methods, including (1) studies of the control of forms, reports, form letters, directives, and the like, (2) studies of the application of microphotographic and other machine techniques, (3) studies of classification systems as a preliminary to the issuance of training manuals, such as those issued on Records Procedures by the Australian Commonwealth Public Service Board and on Records by the New Zealand Public Service Commission, and (4) studies of file room and registry office management. A central staff can also conduct training programs to improve the technical knowledge and effectiveness of personnel concerned with record work.

In controlling the disposition of records, the functions of the central record management staff may be executional as well as analytical and promotional. A centralized staff should be empowered (1) to require agencies to develop disposition plans for records and to submit such plans for review to the archival authority, (2) to require agencies to report on the disposition of their records and to submit for review all requests for space and other facilities desired for record purposes, and (3) to control the use of photographic equipment and other duplicating devices in the government with a view to pooling them for use by any agency having need of them. A centralized staff should provide storage facilities to agencies for the storage of their sernicurrent or noncurrent records that have to be held for limited periods. Such facilities may be made available to the agencies either on a joint-occupancy basis, as is the case in the "limbo" repositories of the British Public Record Office, or on sole-occupancy basis, as is the case in the "purgatory" repositories in the United States. If the facilities are jointly occupied, the work of processing and servicing records within them is performed by the

staffs of the agencies that created the records. If the facilities are administered solely by the central record management staff, this staff performs all processing and servicing activities. A centralized staff, further, may give agencies advice on the methods of developing disposition plans, including the related activities of surveying, describing, and analyzing records, and of preparing disposal schedules and lists. It can prepare general schedules for the disposal of housekeeping and other facilitative records that are the common concern of all government agencies.

The main work in developing a record management program, however, should be done on a decentralized basis. Each governmental agency should have a staff that concerns itself exclusively with the record problems of the agency. The size of the staff should be in relation to the size and complexity of the agency. This staff should bear the major burden of work in controlling the production and maintenance of agency records. It should apply the methods and techniques of good record management, which may be developed by a central staff, to its particular agency, adapting them as need be. It should, for example, determine what filing systems should be used and how records should be classified under them. The agency staff is in the best position to institute methods and techniques that will promote efficiency and economy.

The decentralized agency staff should also bear the major burden of work in controlling the disposition of records. It should determine what should be done with records after they have served their current purposes, i.e. whether they should be microfilmed, transferred to a record center or an archival institution, or destroyed. It should develop disposition plans, disposal schedules, and disposal lists, doing most of the work of surveying, analyzing, and describing records necessary to these ends.

The purposes of a record management staff, it has been noted, are to make records serve the needs of government officials and to dispose of them after those

needs have been served, in the most effective and economical manner possible. The staff should have in mind the double objective of promoting "economy" and "efficiency"—words that have become almost inseparable among those concerned with the methods of government administration, The effectiveness of a record management program should not be judged primarily in statistical terms. It is not reflected solely in the volume of records moved from one place to another— from government offices to record centers or to incinerators or paper mills. It is reflected also, and perhaps most faithfully, in the way records are analyzed to determine how they should be classified and which of them should be disposed of. The efficacy of a record management program is dependent on the earnestness and competency of its staff. The more sincere and able the staff, the more effectively will records be classified and filed for current use; and the better they are classified, the more easily can they be disposed of after they have served current needs. The better the staff, the sounder will be its judgments on the disposition to be made of records. The extent to which sound judgments are made depends on the professional competency and thoroughness with which records are analyzed.

PRODUCTION CONTROL OF RECORDS

Public records are doubtless produced in too large a quantity by most governments of the world, and particularly by the Federal government of the United States. Their production may be reduced by simplifying (1) the functions, (2) the work processes, and (3) the record procedures of government agencies. Their production is affected by influences that range all the way from high level decisions regarding organization and program to the minor procedures prevailing in routine operations. Their production is therefore of concern, in the first instance, to the top level administrators who are responsible for formulating and administering agency programs; in the second instance, to the public officials who are specialists in the broad field of office management; and in the third instance, to the more narrowly

specialized record officers. The three groups of officials should work together for the simplification of operations. The specialists in the fields of record management and office management should be parts of a single team, whose activities are closely coordinated at the top levels of administration.

Simplification of Functioning

Let us consider, first, the simplification of governmental functioning. It is obvious that the basic causes for unnecessary record making and keeping are found in the size of modern governments, the scope of their activities, and the ways in which these activities are conducted. The extensiveness and the complexity of government programs, however, are not our immediate concern; for they are determined by the nature of the social, economic, and other problems with which a government must concern itself. The extent of the government programs cannot be controlled by public officials, who are merely the agents for their execution. The way in which these programs are executed, however, is another matter. The functioning of a government agency can usually be simplified. This, then, is our first point of attack on the problem of reducing the volume of public records.

The machinery of governments is likely to became overly complicated with the lapse of time. Even during the slow expansion of activities in normal times complications usually develop, and during periods of emergency they are sure to develop. Occasionally, then, the governmental machinery needs to be carefully reviewed and its structure and functioning simplified again. An example of such a review is found in the United States where, in recent years, the Hoover Commission on the Reorganization of the Executive Arm of the Government made a comprehensive study of the organization and functioning of the Federal agencies. Its recommendations resulted in substantial improvements and economies in government operations. In the accounting field, for example, it found a "costly

system" to exist under which the General Accounting Office, as an agency of the legislative branch, audited the fiscal operations of the agencies of the executive branch, Under this system millions of expenditure vouchers and supporting papers were sent to a central point for individual examination. The commission proposed an on-site audit program that eliminated the need of sending such papers to Washington, D.C. In consequence of this program, fiscal and accounting methods were simplified and standardized throughout the government and the records relating to such matters were greatly reduced in volume.

Simplification of Record Procedures

Let us consider, thirdly, the simplification of record procedures. Two kinds of record procedures have a particular bearing on the quantity of records produced. The first relates to the creation of records for the purpose of performing repetitive or routine actions; the second relates to the distribution and filing of records. Records pertaining to routine or repetitive actions are usually of a standardized character. In a large government, such as the Federal government of United States, most records are apt In hi; of such a character. They may include reports, directives, Idlers, the numberless forms used in housekeeping activities, statistical schedules and tabulations, and various types of documents used in relation to persons and corporate bodies; but all have in common a large measure of standardization in both style and content. Because of their volume, the control of such records is an important aspect of record management. I£ uncontrolled, they multiply like cells and become a cancerous growth on a government body.

In a program designed to control standardized records, the same steps must be taken as are taken in a program designed to simplify work processes.   The record management expert may have to go over the same ground that has been traversed by the office management expert. Experts in both fields may review the same work processes—the office management expert to learn how things are being

done, the record management expert to learn how records are used in relation to things being done. Both may review the paper work incidental to the doing of things, and both have the same objective in mind: to simplify the doing of things. One is perhaps more concerned with the mechanics, the other with the substance of the work processes.

In the United States, business firms were the first to inaugurate formal programs for standardizing and simplifying paper work. An early study of forms and stationery was that produced by the Hammermill Paper Company in 1930, which engaged the Business Training Corporation of New York City to analyze the business practices of a number of firms over an eighteen-year period. This study, written by Ladson Butler and O. R, Johnson, was published under the title of Management Control through Business Forms, In it the authors state the reasons, as effectively as they have ever been stated, for controlling forms. They indicate that forms are a means of standardizing the handling of routine work, "which constitutes the bulk of every business"; that "when the best method of doing routine work has been evolved," it should be "standardized through the medium of carefully designed forms, manuals, and standard practice instructions." The authors indicate further that "most routine work revolves about forms." They continue; "A study of them, particularly as a group, shows concretely what steps or operations can be eliminated, what changes in sequence are needed, and how writing or other clerical operations can be minimized through more thoughtful designing of forms.

In the Federal government of the United States the problem of controlling forms did not receive much systematic attention until World War II. The wartime government programs for the control of the production, prices, transportation, and consumption of commodities and resources involved all citizens of the country. They thus resulted in many routine transactions, all of which had to be performed quickly under wartime conditions. In this situation, records, which received the

simultaneous attention of many government employees, were reproduced in astonishing numbers, and were generally reduced to forms. A spate of manuals on the control of forms issued from many government agencies. The first was one produced by the War Production Board in 1943. In the following year manuals were issued by the Office of Price Administration, the Army Service Forces, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. In the post-war period the best of such manuals was that produced in 1947 by the Bureau of the Budget under the title of Simplifying Procedure through Forms Control.

To control forms, information is needed on the use and the context of each form in a particular government operation. This information should be used to decide, first, whether the form is actually needed; and, secondly, if needed, what should be its content, format, incidence, distribution, and final disposition. By a careful analysis of the paper work incidental to a particular operation, it may be possible to revise forms—to eliminate, consolidate, simplify, and, in general, to dovetail all forms used in an operation. A special aspect of forms control is that relating to form letters. The National Archives and Records Service has recently issued a Records Management Handbook entitled Form Letters. The Handbook embodies the experience of a number of government agencies in conducting programs for the management of form letters. It suggests standards to be observed in creating and designing form letters and methods by which they should be controlled. The way in which a correspondence management program can achieve economy and efficiency is strikingly demonstrated in a project that was recently undertaken by the Records Administration Branch of the Internal Revenue Service and the Records Management Division of the National Archives and Records Service. The project was designed to improve the management of the correspondence of the Collection Division of the Office of the District Director of the United States Internal Revenue Service in Baltimore, Maryland. This division

is concerned with the receipt of tax returns, the collection and deposit of tax moneys, the determination and assessment of tax liability, and the like. In the course of its work it handles a very largo volume of mail. As a result of the project designed to improve tile management of this mail, the routing, composition, and typing of letters were greatly simplified.

A special type of standardized records is that consisting of authoritative issuances. Such issuances serve to communicate staff policies and procedures to the various line offices of an agency. Policies are guiding principles that indicate the course of action to be followed in various kinds of transactions. Procedures provide detailed instructions on the specific steps and methods to be followed in carrying out policies. The policies and procedures may relate to matters of varying degrees of importance. Memoranda, bulletins, and notices usually relate to matters that are of a temporary nature; circulars to matters of a semi permanent nature; and orders, rules, and regulations to matters of a permanent nature. The directives that embody policies and procedures may be issued in various series, according to the degree of their importance, or according to the type of function to which they relate, i.e. facilitative or substantive. They may also be issued in various forms. Directives of a temporary or semi permanent nature should normally be issued in loose leaf series; those of a permanent nature may be issued in the form of manuals or handbooks.

The second kind of record procedure that affects the quantity of records relates to their distribution and filing. Record-keeping systems have a very important bearing on the quantity of records produced. This may be illustrated by comparing the record situation under a registry system with that under American filing systems. Under a registry system, whenever a new subject comes to the attention of a government office, a new file is opened on it. The movement of this file is controlled as it passes from office to office. Additional documents that arise

in connection with the subject are added to the file in single copy only. The whole system results in a control of the production and movement of documents, and in their consolidation by file subjects. Under American filing systems, on the other hand, duplicate copies of documents are usually made for each office to which a matter is referred. In times of emergency, to speed up action when matters may be referred to very many offices, documents may be duplicated to an astonishing degree. Duplication then becomes a substitute for control of the movement and distribution of documents. The greater the degree of control that is exercised over them, the less documents are likely to be created. While the controls that are implicit in the registry system cannot be instituted in American government agencies, it is obvious that there is prodigality in the number of copies of particular documents that are produced and filed in some of them.

The record management expert should review the needs of various officials for copies of documents. On the basis of this review he should ascertain where copies of records are actually needed, and where they should be filed. In ascertaining where copies should be distributed and filed he will get into the problem of classification, which, in its broad sense, covers the matter of decentralizing files. If files are improperly decentralized, or if individual documents within files are improperly classified, unnecessary records will be produced. In particular, the record management expert should see to it that record copies of essential documents, that is, the copies that serve as the official record of a matter, are properly distributed and filed. In emergency agencies it is very important to designate particular sets of serial issuances as record sets. These may include sets of procedural, policy, organizational, and repertorial documents. Such documents are often reproduced in innumerable copies, which are liberally broadcast throughout various offices. Unless the record officer gives directions for

developing record sets, such documents will neither be accumulated nor preserved systematically.

In assessing the efficacy of various measures taken to control the production of records, it is important to place things in proper perspective. Paper work management, by and large, is concerned with the mechanics, not with the substance of government operations. While great things can be accomplished by simplifying paper work, many improvements in government operations may be attributed as much to the simplification of work processes as to the simplification of paper work. The remedies proposed for improving the management of paper work, moreover, are often inadequate, going no further than vague and indefinite references to the "adoption of standards and controls" or "the use of tested methods and practices" for making and keeping records. The problems of paper work cannot be solved by concocting phrases which, like the nostrums of quacks, are prescribed indiscriminatingly to overcome all difficulties that beset the users of records. Inefficient paper work is often a symptom of improper administration. Such ills cannot be cured by improvements in paper work management alone. The ills lie deeper. The cure for many record problems lies in improving the work processes, and, more generally, the organization and functioning of government.

REVIEW OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

Stark (1983) observes that despite the invaluable role records play in organizations, officials often exhibit misconceptions and indifference to the management of records. This attitude leads to invaluable waste of time; human effort, materials, space and money that would astound the officials were they to realize its magnitude and implications. According to Evborokhai (1996) in a survey conducted by UNESCO and the International Council on Archives in 1992 confirmed that mere records is crisis of major proportions in the state of records

management and archival services in Africa and that Registry systems are in an extremely dilapidated state and in certain cases have collapsed altogether.

Evborokhai (1996) in another study further supports these views when he states that the poor handling of government records has led to unnecessary expenditure through under utilization of government office accommodation and equipment, destruction or loss of important records, duplication of effort and a general crippling of government's reconstruction and development programme because of inefficient information system. In support of this fact, Popoola (2000) traces the greatest challenge confronting public administrators today to how they can effectively and economically control and utilize their ever-increasing information base. He now puts forward as solution to this problem the adoption and implementation of integrated records management programme.

Mnjama (2000) in his view declares that people all over the world have realized that information and particularly government held information constitutes a public resource created, assembled and maintained by public servants and paid for by the taxpayers. As a result, the general public is making greater demands for access to the vast quantities of information held by government agencies, archival institutions and whenever possible, the private sector. As the citizens become aware of their rights to information which to them can engender accountability, transparency and good governance, their demand is therefore geared towards changes in the manner archivists and records managers collect, store, manipulate and retrieve information.

Bantin (2002) in his assessment of new record keeping systems explains that record creation occurs at the event or transaction level, and the actual records to be analyzed are those documents received as inputs to the system and those records created as a result of the outputs or elementary processes generated in response to the external or temporal event.

Akussah (1996) points out that it is universally accepted among archives and records management professionals that the cycle concept is the most integrated and comprehensive approach to records management. He stresses further the fact that nowadays, almost all financial institutions, corporations and parastatals have functional records management systems.

According to Ugwunze (1992) in her study of "Examination of Records Management in the University of Lagos Registry", in Nigeria, she discovered that various types of records are created and kept at the registry for which finding aids such as an index and a simple list arc used. Common types of records according to Texas Library Association (2001) include minutes, correspondence, financial records, reports, papers, published materials and photographs and when these records are to be transferred, anything that relates to the development or interpretation of policies and procedures should be retained.

Katuul (1999) says even though conventional record formats are commonly known, electronic records seem to have taken a prominent position in the past two decades. These records have changed from the days of mainframe generated and application specific documents to the world of rational databases and electronic formats of text, data graphics, images and voice. There are also "compound" or "smart" multimedia documents that can exist as "virtual" composites on a computer screen, although they are randomly stored, and may be generated by different users, for different purposes and in different organizational contexts.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2003) indicates that use of electronics equipment makes the documentation and preservation of records more complex. Large computers, remote time-sharing services, mini computers, personal computers, word processors, and other devices can be used to create, maintain, and dispose records. Electronic mail and the use of personal computers as, "note pads" are other examples of further elimination of the traditional paper documents which

have long been the focus of records management. This agency further states that before disposition whether electronic mail messages are record or non-record materials is a function of the use of the document/ message, not of the medium upon which it is recorded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Proper records management goes a long way in enhancing the development of an organization through improvement in policy making, new technological application, new marketing strategy, acquisition of new skills and projection into the future, to mention but a few. All these immense benefits therefore call for adequate training of staff in every aspect of records management. The practice whereby a few of the staff of this Corporation charged with records management are trained in the technical-know-how needs to be given a wider scope. Training opportunities should be extended to all and sundry in this particular area. Necessary formal training complemented with seminars, workshops and conferences are ideal. Again, uniformity should be maintained in the types of storage facilities for records of the Corporation by all its departments so that the life span of records can be ensured.

As long as there is a Records Centre where some of the departments send their non-current files for future reference, then other departments should emulate this attitude and avoid the practice of arranging such files in a room, on shelves or dumping them in a corner of a room unarranged. In the alternative, if the Corporation finds it not convenient enough for its departments to send their non-current files to the Records Centre, such files can be taken to the National Archives at the University of Ibadan for safe-keeping.

Emphasis needs to be placed more on security measures. It is better to nib a problem in the bud than to start looking for control in an event of occurrence of

disasters. More of fire and smoke detectors should be installed in the departments for fire detection and suppression,

CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, records become an essential tool of administration without which operational processes and functions cannot be performed in organizations. The importance of records underscores the need for economy and efficiency in their creation, use and maintenance and disposition, which records management, provides. The Corporation is not unaware of the value of records and the need to manage them going by the findings of this study.

The Nigerian Railway Corporation contributes in no small measure to the growth of the Nigerian economy via transportation of goods and peoples, therefore proper keeping of its records has a great role to play in this direction. To achieve this, necessary measures should be put in place to see that the recommendations advanced above are addressed through meaningful action-plans.

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