

Strategies for Improvement of Records Management in Enhancing Quality of Services in Institutions of Higher Learning: A Focus on Moi University, Kenya

Carolyn Nyaboke Musembe
P.O. BOX 2327 - 30100, Eldoret, Kenya

Abstract

Public as well as private organizations are increasingly realizing that sound records management is linked to service delivery. However, Institutions of higher learning are yet to realize the role of records management to quality service delivery. This may be due to lack of policy frameworks on management, destruction of records and inadequate qualified staff among others. This makes success of such institutions impossible. This paper aims at rolling out strategies towards improving management of records in institutions of higher learning to enhance quality services. Challenges are identified and ways and strategies for improvement of records management to enhance quality of services suggested for the Institution. The author utilized a comprehensive Service Quality Gap Model and the Records Continuum Model. Applying both qualitative and quantitative approach, data was collected through face to face interviews and questionnaires. The sample size was 78 respondents drawn from Moi University, Kenya. The study established that records management aspect is not well developed thus undermining quality service delivery. The study suggested strategies for the study. Conducting of a records survey to understand the university's records environment is one of the strategies suggested by the study to aid in the implementation of records management and service delivery in the university.

Keywords: Records management, Strategy, service delivery, quality management, higher learning institutions.

1. Introduction

The development of records management has incorporated principles integral to information science as 'the means of processing information for optimum accessibility and usability, concerned with the origination, collection, organization, storage, retrieval, interpretation, transmissions, transformation and use of information' (Vakkari & Cronin, 1992). Such principles are adopted by records managers in seeking to enhance the access and use of records.

Stressing the use of technology in records management, McDonald (1995) argues that in developing record keeping solutions, it is necessary to understand the evolution that is taking place in the use of technology. The application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to the management of records therefore, will go a long way in making such records accessible and usable thus enhancing quality services in institutions. According to Wamukoya and Mutula (2005) as cited by Kemoni (2009), effective e-records has the potential to improve service delivery and enhance accountability and transparency in government but only if the requisite skills are met.

Therefore, sound and quality of services are achieved through sound records management, as Kanzi (2010) adds that sound records management programme is the foundation for managing resources and the delivery of the services to the public. Transparency, due time, finding information fast, accountability, are some of the products of proper records management, hence efficient and effective service delivery.

1.1 Records management models

1.1.1 Records life-cycle concept

The life cycle model was conceived in 1956 by Theodore R. Schellenberg. His view was that the life-cycle of records had a life similar to a biological organism which uses a birth to death analogy that records are born, live through youth and old age then die Shepherd and Yeo (2003). According to Xiaomi (2001), the records life cycle concepts involves creation, distribution, maintenance and use, appraisal and disposition. Though the model has frequently been used, in recent years as observed by Shepherd and Yeo (2003), the life cycle model has been subject to much adverse critics as follows:

1. Some records do not die but are retained indefinitely because of their continuing value.
2. The division between stages of the life cycle in the 'three ages' model is seen as artificial, for example records thought to be non-current may have renewed period of currency if the activity that gave birth to them is revived.
3. The model do not allow for the reputation stages, or for stages to be omitted, although in practice this frequently happens.
4. McKemish (1997) as cited by Shepherd and Yeo (2003) argues that the life-cycle concept perpetuates an artificial distinction between records kept for business purposes and records

kept for cultural reasons and thus between the professional perspectives archivists and records managers.

5. The critics also suggest that it is too focused on records physical entities and on operational tasks, especially those associated with the custody of paper records.

1.1.2 The Records Continuum model

Australian Records Management Standard AS4390 defines records continuum as the consistent and coherent regime of management processes from the time of the creation of records (and before creation, in the design of a record keeping system) through to the preservation and use of records as archives AS4390 (2004) part 1: clause 4.22). Shepherd and Yeo (2003) believe that there are no separate steps in managing records and it is seen as a continuous process where one element of the continuum passes seamlessly into another.

The most basic difference between the continuum model and the lifecycle approach is that while the life cycle model proposes a strict separation of records management responsibilities, the continuum model is based upon an integration of the responsibilities and accountabilities associated with the management of records.

Xiomi (2003) states that the continuum's purpose-oriented, systems approach to records management fundamentally changes the role of recordkeeping. Instead of being reactive, managing records after they have been created, record keeping becomes proactive. In partnership with other stakeholders, identifying records of organisation activities that need to be retained, then implementing business systems designed with built-in recordkeeping capability ensures capturing records of evidential quality as they are created.

The model gives an approach for conceptualizing the records continuum and for thinking about recordkeeping in organizations and the society in general. It pinpoints the core evidential, recordkeeping and contextual features of the continuum against the dimensions of the recordkeeping function and it is itself placed in a broader social, legal and technological environment (McKemmish, 1997; Upward, 2001; Xiomi, 2001).

McKemmish (1997) states that, the continuum is holistic and multidimensional in orientation; it can be refracted and separated into its constituent layers as explained in the dimensions of the records continuum below.

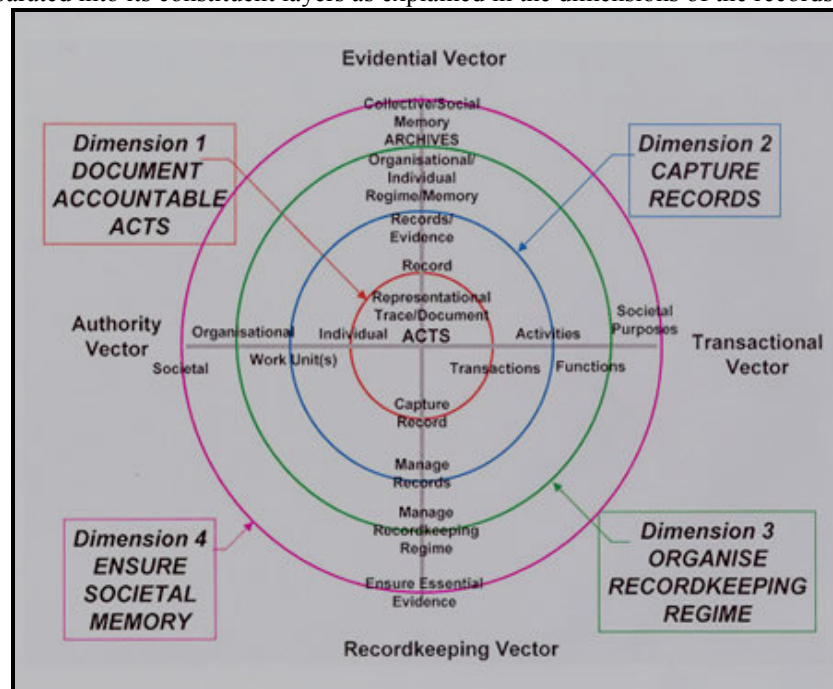


Figure 1: The Records Continuum Model
 Source: Frank Upward (2001)

Dimension 1-create

This encompasses the players who carry out the act, for instance the employees in an organisation, the work relates to decisions, communications and actions, the acts themselves, the documents which records the acts and the trace the presentation of the acts.

Dimension 2-capture

This involves the personal and corporate recordkeeping systems, which captures documents in context in ways that support their capacity to act as evidence of the social and business activities of the units responsible for the activities.

Dimension 3-organise

This is the organisation of record keeping processes. It is concerned with the manner in which an organisation

and/or individual defines their record keeping regime. In so doing, they constitute/ form the archives as memory of their business or social functions.

Dimension 4-pluralise

This covers the methods in which the archives are brought into an encompassing (ambient) and cultural memory of the institutionalized social purposes and roles of individuals and corporate bodies.

The dimensions have no boundaries but they are coordinated and integrated.

Different record keeping activities can happen simultaneously across the four dimensions as Shepherd and Yeo (2003) state that the dimensions in the continuum are not time based, but represent different perspectives on the management of records. They continue by stating that, (citing McKemmish, 1997) the records model embraces the view that records function simultaneously as organizational and collective memory from the time of their creation.

McKemmish (2002) notes that, the mechanisms of best practice behind the records continuum model are ideal for integrating records and archives management because the records continuum focuses on the similarities rather than differences, qualities and quantities rather than quantities alone, positive and cohesive ways of thinking rather than disparate or passive ways, integrated policy making rather than fragmented frameworks, integrated control of policy implementation rather than separate control, integrated rather than disparate approaches to problem solving; and meeting customers’ needs through collaboration rather than by duplication and overlap.

According to (McKemmish, 1997; Upward, 2001; Xiomi, 2001) the records continuum presents a useful framework for the exploration of the continuum of responsibilities that relate to recordkeeping Fynn (2001) further, explains that the records continuum model is significant because of the following:

1. Broadness of the interpretation of records and recordkeeping systems offered by the lifecycle model. Such broadness is helpful given the variety of contexts in which archivists and records managers operate and in which archives and records are used.
2. Remind us that records (including archives) are created and maintained for use as a result of business and administrative functions and processes, rather than as ends in themselves.
3. Emphasizes cooperation beyond the walls of repositories especially between the closely related, if occasionally estranged professions of archives administration and records management.

1.1.3 The Service Gap Model

The gap model of service quality was first developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry in 1985. The authors proposed a conceptual model of service quality indicating that consumers’ or clients’ perception towards a service quality depends on the gaps existing in the organisation. According to Brown and Bond (1995), “the gap model is one of the best received and most heuristically valuable contributions to the services literature”.

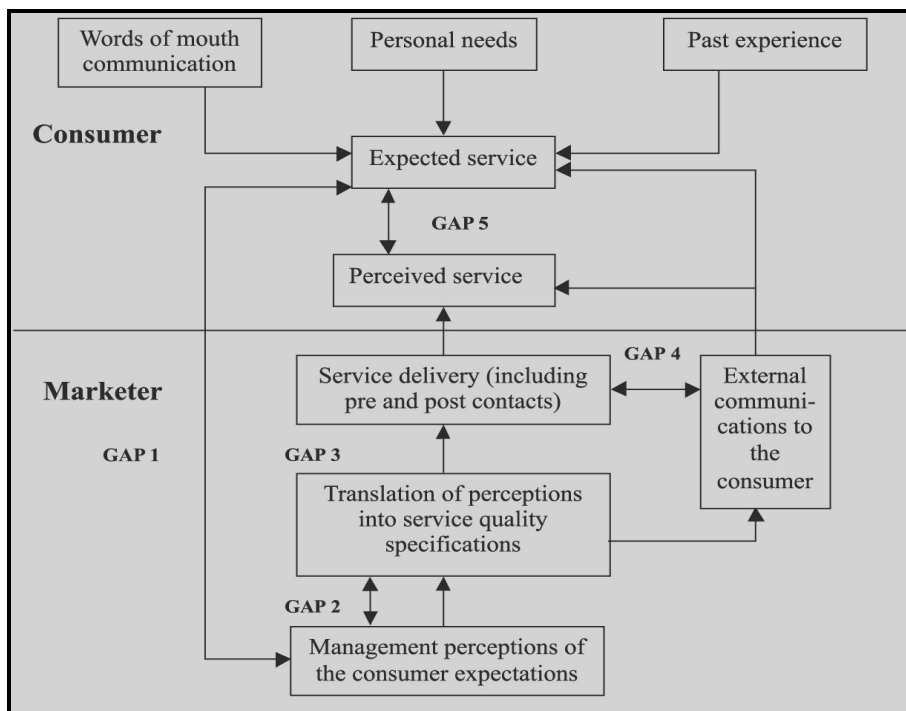


Figure 2: Service Gap Model
 Source: Parasuraman et al. (1985)

Gap 1: Customers' expectations versus management perceptions: the management may have inaccurate perception of what customers actually expect. This gap exist as a result of the lack of a market research orientation, inadequate upward communication and too many layers of management (Parasuraman *et al*, 1985, Gronroos, 2000).

Gap 2: Management perceptions versus service specifications: this is the difference between the top management perceptions of client's expectations and the actual standards they set for service delivery, as a result of inadequate commitment to service quality, a perception of unfeasibility, inadequate task standardization and an absence of goal setting (Parasuraman *et al*, 1985, Gronroos, 2000).

Gap 3: Service specifications versus service delivery: as a result of role ambiguity and conflict, poor employee-job fit and poor technology-job fit, inappropriate supervisory control systems, lack of perceived control and lack of teamwork (Parasuraman, *et al*, 1985; Gronroos, 2000).

Gap 4: Service delivery versus external communication: as a result of inadequate horizontal communications and propensity to over-promise that is the difference between what a firm promises about a service and what it delivers (Parasuraman *et al*, 1985, Gronroos, 2000).

Gap 5: The discrepancy between customer expectations and their perceptions of the service delivered: as a result of the influences exerted from the customer side and the shortfalls (gaps) on the part of the service provider. In this case, customer expectations are influenced by the extent of personal needs, word of mouth recommendation and past service experiences (Parasuraman *et al*, 1985; Gronroos, 2000).

The model identifies five gaps relating to managerial perceptions of service quality, and tasks associated with service delivery to customers. The first four gaps (Gap 1, Gap 2, Gap 3, Gap 4,) are identified as functions of the way in which service is delivered, whereas Gap 5 pertains to the customer and as such is considered to be the true measure of service quality. The Gap on which the SERVQUAL methodology has influence is Gap 5. The SERVQUAL instrument has been the predominant method used to measure consumers' perceptions of service quality. It has five generic dimensions or factors and are stated as follows (van Iwaarden *et al*, 2003):

1. Tangibles: Physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel.
2. Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
3. Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
4. Assurance (including competence, courtesy, credibility and security): Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
5. Empathy (including access, communication, understanding the customer): Caring and individualized attention that the firm provides to its customers.

Browns (1989) investigated the gap analysis of professional service quality and concluded that gap analysis is a straightforward and appropriate way to identify inconsistencies between provider and client perceptions of service performance, addressing these gaps seems to be a logical basis for formulating strategies and tactics to ensure consistent expectations and experiences, thus increasing the likelihood of satisfaction and positive quality evaluation

The service gap model gives insights and propositions regarding client's perceptions of service quality and it helps predict, generate and identify the key factors that cause the gap to the organisation in meeting its client's expectation. The gap model of service quality is an important client-satisfaction framework. It plays a very important role in enhancing the quality of services in organisation.

The theories thus addressed the core issues of concern in the study and hence qualified to be used as the theoretical models upon which the study anchored in so far as the institution and management of records and quality of services is concerned.

1.2 Relevance of the continuum model and Service Quality Gaps in records management

The continuum model proposes integration of functionalities into an organizations business process. These theories relevance to the study stem from the fact that the study is concerned with quality issues in records management just like the theory itself. It helps in identifying records of organisation activities that need to be retained, then implementing business systems designed with built-in recordkeeping capability that ensures capturing records of evidential quality as they are created. This is important for a large institution like Moi University where a lot of records are created from diverse business activities ensuring that the records are well captured. McKemmish (2002) notes that, the mechanisms of best practice behind the records continuum model are ideal for integrating records and archives management because the records continuum focuses on quality and quantity rather than quantity alone. This is an indication that the records continuum, advocates for the quality in the management of the large numbers of records produced in an organisation so as to enhance the quality of services provided by the organisation.

In terms of service quality, the model of service quality in conjunction with SERVQUAL is considered the best approach to the concept of quality for this study. In addition to being able to point out clearly that a particular area needs to be addressed in so far as improvement in service quality is concerned, it is paramount to

have a mechanism that can be used to evaluate the extent to which the approach taken in addressing the identified service quality gap meets expectations. This model is able to address both issues at the same time. It provides a mechanism through which areas of weakness can be easily identified (the five gaps) and a mechanism through which any measure taken to bridge the gaps can be evaluated for its effectiveness (SERVQUAL).

In addition, the model is applicable to practically any organizational or institutional setting. This attribute makes it fit quite easily with the current study because students who are the main clients in higher education institutions always have expectations which the staff strive to meet. The members of staff too, in the process of delivering services, have standards that they often seek to achieve. This means that first, there is need to acknowledge that there is a gap to be filled and second, in the process of filling the gap, there has to be a yardstick which measures the processes of filling the gap. The model of service quality gaps in conjunction with SERVQUAL fortunately addresses both concerns and is thus considered the best services quality models.

2. Materials and Methods

The study employed a case study design. A case study seeks to describe a unit in detail in context and holistically (Kombo & Tromp 2006). This enabled the author to solely focus on Moi University, Main Campus. The study sought to identify the strategies that can be put in place to improve records management in institutions of higher learning. Burns and Groove (2003) describe population as all the elements that meet the criteria for inclusion in a study. In this study, the criteria for inclusion was restricted to staff of Moi University, Main Campus, this was because they encounter the records system every single day and are well acquainted with the service quality at the institution. The study population therefore consisted of 111 respondents drawn from main campus. The subjects included six (6) top Management representatives, thirty five (35) Action Officers six (6) Records Supervisors, Four (4) auditors, Forty (40) Records staff and Twenty (20) Secretaries. The researchers' criterion for selection was based on the respondents' role as creators, custodians, users and key informants.

The population was derived from Main campus specifically the following departments;

- i. University Management;
- ii. Division of Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic, Research & Extension;
- iii. Quality Management System & ISO Compliance department (QMS& ISOC)
- iv. Quality Assurance (QA);
- v. Dean Student Affairs;
- vi. Health Services Registry;
- vii. Financial Services and;
- viii. Central Registry System.

Purposive sampling which is a non probability sampling technique was used to facilitate inclusion of the best candidates to ensure that quality data was collected. Barreiro and Albandoz (2006) describe purposive sampling as a sampling technique in which the person who is selecting the sample tries to make the sample representative, depending on his or her opinion. This enabled the author to capture data from all the departments enabling her to get the views of respondents on the roles of records management in enhancing quality of services in Moi University.

The sample size comprised 78 respondents. They included: six (6) Top Management representatives, twenty two (22) Action Officers, six (6) Records Supervisors, four (4) auditors, thirty (30) Records staff and ten (10) Secretaries were interviewed or given questionnaires to fill.

The author used Gay's guidelines (1996) where is of the opinion that if a population is less than 100 there is no need for sampling and for a population up to 500 , 50% of the population should be sampled.

Table 1: Study population and Sample size (n=78)

Respondents	Total population Respon	Sample size	Sample size (%)
Top management representatives	6	6	100
Action Officers	35	22	63
Records supervisors	6	6	100
Auditors	4	4	100
Records staff	40	30	75
Secretaries	20	10	50
Total Targeted Population	111	78	70

Source: Field data (2013)

Both primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data was obtained from face to face interviews and self administered questionnaires. Documentary review including Official reports from KEBS and internal audit reports formed part of the secondary data. Observation was not a main data collection method but it was applied when carrying out interviews. The methods facilitated adequate and reliable data for the study.

Documentary sources of data collection were used in order to obtain data that was used to strengthen

the data obtained from primary sources. Documentary sources are data that already exists; Kothari (2004) states that secondary sources may be either published or unpublished.

The study applied qualitative and some element of quantitative data analysis approaches. Data analysis means to organize, provide structure and elicit meaning, as Mugenda and Mugenda (2004) is of the view that, data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of information collected.

3. Results

3.1 Suggestions for improving records management to enhance quality service delivery

The study sought suggestions from the respondents on the ways to improve the records management in enhancing quality service delivery.

3.1.1 Supervisors, auditors and the management team were interviewed and gave the following responses:

Management

1. "Featuring the management of records aspect in the future strategic plan so as to give it more weight."
2. "Capacity building through recruitment of qualified records staff and conducting of in- house training."
3. "Sensitize management staff on records management practices through workshops and seminars."
4. "Revision of the budget allocation to the registries and management of all university records created."
5. "Computerization of records management should be developed and implemented to enhance access and retrieval of records to enhance service delivery."
6. "Foreseeing the development and implementation of a records management policy."

Auditors

1. "Automate the records management function."
2. "Adopt GEMBA KAIZEN methodology which advocates for proper management of records."
3. "Advocacy of records management function as a major goal to quality service provision."
4. "Develop and implement a records management policy"
5. "Regular awareness to all staff and training of records management champions."

Records Supervisors

1. "Support from the management staff by enabling them to understand both tangible and non tangible benefits of records."
2. "Hiring a records manager as a critical staff in management of records in the university."
3. "Solicit for allocation of adequate funds to carryout records management practices."
4. "Adopt a records management standard 15489 to work in conjunction with the ISO 9001:2008."
5. "Automation of the records management function."
6. "Records management awareness should be carried out through workshops and seminars."
7. "Carrying in job training or continuous professional training in records management."
8. "Employing adequate qualified personnel."
9. "Frequent sensitization of the quality manual and procedures clause 4.2.4 and all procedures available in the manual."
10. "Motivating staff by giving promotions, providing pay rise, recognition and tokens of appreciations."
11. "Employing staff with the right profession."
12. "Acquisition of lockable cabinets to store records for security purposes."
13. "Monitoring and evaluation from the regulatory bodies for instance the National Archives."
14. "Develop partnership and cooperation with records and archives management bodies and organizations."

3.1.2 Questionnaires on the other hand, gave the following responses:

Action Officers

The Action Officers made the following recommendations:

1. "Carrying out seminars and workshops to sensitize staff on records management practices and its importance to service delivery."
2. "Awareness on management of electronic from creation to disposal."
3. "The University needs to formulate a records management policy."
4. "Automate the records management function."
5. "Employ a records manager to oversee management of records in the university."
6. "Increased top management support to management of records."
7. "Store files and vital records in lockable cabinets."
8. "Employ adequate qualified personnel."
9. "Increased budget for records management function."
10. "Use of passwords on available computers to avoid the issue of adding deleting of files on the computer."

Records staff

The records staff made the following suggestions:

1. "Employ dedicated/ trained RM staff."
2. "Advocacy of records management functions as a major goal to quality service provision."
3. "Employ a Records Manager to guide in records management issues."
4. "Training of staff; in-house training and sending staff in colleges and universities to train in records management courses."
5. "Sensitize the management on the importance of RM in enhancing service delivery."
6. "Provide adequate funding to help carryout records functions."
7. "Officially adopt a RM program or policy for the institution"
8. "Adopt a records management standard 15489 to work in conjunction with the ISO 9001:2008."
9. "Sensitization of other staff through seminars and workshops on the importance of records management."
10. "Management should provide adequate funding in records management."
11. "Acquisition of more computers to speed up record creation and storage."
12. "Automation of records to assist fast service delivery."

Secretaries

1. "Electronic management of records should be embraced more than it is now to enable quick access of documents when needed."
2. "Provision of more computers to enable large capacity of space."
3. "Carrying out of sensitization workshops and seminars to help sharpen records management skills."
4. "Development and implementation of a records management policy."

4. Discussion

From the suggestions, current records management in the university needs improvement so as to provide continuity of business operations. This will enable management to obtain records that can help them make proper short term and long term plans to facilitate effective and efficient service delivery. There should be commitment to service quality through records management among management and record creators. This should be addressed through proper goal setting and as well as proper planning. From the finding, the respondents are advocating for development of a records management program and policy to guide and improve the handling and management of records.

Appointing of a Records Manager to oversee the development and implementation of a records management programme and policy among other records management activities need to be prioritized. The appointee must be on senior level in the organizational hierarchy holding a doctorate degree and having experience as an added advantage in order to influence policy on records management in the university.

From the study findings, adopting a recordkeeping standard ISO 15489 was recommended, it is a recordkeeping standard developed by ISO meant to provide records management guidelines in support of implementation of QMS (ISO 2001). The standard therefore operationalises the requirements of clause 4.2.4 of ISO 9001: 2008 which provides for the procedure on control of records. The findings depict that introduction of electronic records management system will enhance efficiency in terms of speed, accuracy, security of records and it will also encourage a backup system. As Wamukoya and Mutula (2005) states that new technologies and their growing adoption and use is rapidly revolutionizing the organisational culture that is positively impacting on the way organisations work, make decisions and even document their activities.

Employment of qualified, adequate staff to handle the management of records has also been recommended so as to enhance professionalism thus curb the issue of nonconformities in records management as the IRMT (2000), states that the quality of any records management programme is directly related to the quality of the staff that operates it and the financial and technological resources available to maintain it. On the other hand, Parasuraman *et al.* (1985), Gronroos (2000) explain that to overcome a service delivery gap, providing employee training, clarifying the tasks of all personnel to avoid task ambiguity and making proper changes to technology and systems so that they can be supportive to the quality goal.

The study findings also indicated low funding directed to the records management function. The heads of registries should ensure that they prepare a comprehensive budget and be able to justify to the management the reason for the comprehensive budget. According to Sanderson and Ward (2003) as cited by Makura (2005) the importance of records management is increasingly being recognized in organizations'. It is therefore the mandate and responsibility of Records Managers to ensure that they gain the attention of decision makers in the organisation. Gaining is all about convincing the management on the importance of the existence of records management.

Sensitization of staff through workshops seminars on records management and its importance in service delivery should be considered for this will enable each staff to have knowledge on the importance of creating

and handling records as depicted from the study. Staff development is an essential tool for building awareness and knowledge of records management and what benefits that is brought with it. It is also a key strategic change agent for developing the quality culture as Sallis (2002) states that motivational theories have long recognized that training is one of the most important motivators in any organization's armoury.

5. Conclusion

Being an ISO 9001:2008 certified institution; the standard encourages proper documentation and proper record keeping though from the study findings it was evident that records management suffers from nonconformities. This is evidence from a report presented on implementation of ISO 9001:2008 Quality Management System during a Non-Teaching Heads of Departments meeting on Tuesday 26th June, 2012. Poor records control (not keeping records well, poor filling, no folioing, no labeling), lack of feedback analysis were the recurring non-conformities at the University. This has also been noted in the ISO 9001:2008 Surveillance Audit Report on Moi University-Main Campus conducted by KEBS between 9th -11th October 2013 where it reports that there is lack of records protection, poor documentation, commitment in enhancing quality seem to be deteriorating and that customer complaints/feedback does not meet the requirements of ISO 9001:2008.

6. Recommendations

According to the findings, the study established the following recommendations/Strategies:

1. Development of a records management program and policy to guide and improve the quality of recorded information in the university in line with the university's set goals and objectives from creation maintenance storage and disposal of records.
2. Introduction of electronic records management system to enhance efficiency in terms of speed, accuracy, security of records and to also encourage a backup system.
3. Employment of qualified, adequate staff to handle the management of records has also been recommended so as to enhance professionalism thus curb the issue of nonconformities.
4. Sensitization of staff through workshops seminars on records management and its importance in service delivery as this will enable each staff have knowledge and appreciate the importance of creating and handling records.
5. Placement of records management within the organizational structure as an indication there is responsibility and commitment by the management and the organisation at large towards records management.
6. Employment of a Records Manager to guide and oversee the records management practices in the university.

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