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Information Governance for Enhancing the Performance of Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

The essence of information has become more crucial for organizations, particularly in the digital age, where the creation of information is at exponential growth. The absence of proper classification of data and information hampered the quality in terms of consistency and reliability of the information. As a consequence, there is data redundancy, inaccuracy, and uncertainty. Hence, an information governance framework would be developed based on empirical evidence gathered in the research. Face to face interviews were conducted for data collection and in depth interviews carried out in ensuring a comprehensive understanding on the issue.

Keywords: Information governance, information, sustainability, risk

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1.0 Introduction

In the digital age, the role of information is becoming more crucial for organizations. Despite various types of information systems, organizations are still uncertain about the accuracy, trustworthiness, and timeliness of their information, particularly in quick decision-making situations. In Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), reliance on accurate, trusted, and up-to-date information is essential, particularly in the age where ranking becomes the main priority by the Ministry of Higher Education. Information on core activities such as teaching and learning, research and innovation, publication, internationalization, students, and alumni must be readily available for strategic decision making, performance analysis, international ranking, and daily operations purposes. In the information management perspective, proper classification of data and information is a prerequisite for the consistency and reliability of all information systems, ensuring comprehensive retrieval across various information systems should inter-operability exist. The study aims to develop a university-wide information governance framework for enhancing the performance of higher education institutions.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Essence of information management in HEIs

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Effective information management will help universities to meet regulatory and audit requirements and provide proof of the university's activities for litigation support. During the auditing exercise, actions are reviewed through consulting and recording details of the documents that legalized the actions. In a situation where the records and information were not properly managed, the audit judgment would not be reliable due to untrustworthy information (Muhammed et al., 2022). Properly controlled university records and information help the university in conducting its daily operations in an efficient and accountable manner. It also enables consistent service delivery, supports managerial decision-making, and transparent policy formulation. According to Azman and Nordiana (2012), records are created for a purpose and as evidence of a transaction; they have ongoing use as means of management, accountability, operational continuity, legal evidence and disaster recovery.

2.2 Information governance

The critical need to coordinate information in ways compatible with organizations' needs is at the heart of IG which aims to provide easy access to strategic information, the centralization of processes and data and information organization demanded that information systems be structured and processed (Janssen, Wimmer & Deljoo, 2015). Large international organizations such as Intel and IBM successfully implemented information governance, enabling them to strike a balance between cost, risk, and benefits (Tallon & Short, 2013; Hulme, 2012).

Gartner (2021) defines IG as the specification of decision rights and an accountability framework to ensure appropriate behavior in the valuation, creation, storage, use, archiving, and deletion of information. It includes the processes, roles, policies, standards, and metrics that ensure the effective and efficient use of information in enabling an organization to achieve its goals. In other words, IG incorporates a wide set of subjects that covers information protection, information quality, and information lifecycle management. The essence of the IG policy at the University of Cambridge Clinical Medicine School is to provide a comprehensive IG system for managing identifiable information relevant to science. The policy's purpose is to put in place the appropriate framework, tools, and processes to ensure that the information necessary to support the research carried out by clinical school participants is properly collected and stored in compliance with all current legislation and guidelines (ICO, 2018).

Universities need an IG framework to determine what information the university has, which party is held responsible for the information, the location of the information, and the time for retaining information (Kopler, 2017). To ensure that records are only accessed by only those who are authorized to do so, Oxford University has identified the importance for its stakeholders to have reliable information they may need to discharge their duties, bearing in mind the role of having access to secured information to ensure continuity of its business, legal compliance, strict adherence to the institution's rules and legislations (Hobb, 2015).

The regulations should be made available for the university community's consumption; for instance, Cambridge University makes all key policy documents available via its public-facing website, including the IG policy framework. It ensures they are equally available to staff, students, and the public (ICO Cambridge University, 2018). To this end, IG in a corporate organization refers to a set of established policies and procedures an employer and employees implement and follow to manage sensitive and proprietary information (Iannarelli & O'shaughness, 2015). Information governance enhances the trustworthiness of information if supported by organizational strategy and commitment, particularly from top management. This ensures that accurate information is available at the right time and the right place (Azman & Nordiana, 2012).

Different departments and faculties generate and use records and information to carry out their respective activities in line with the university's mandate. Conducting these activities produces records and information that indicate that the universities are fulfilling their statutory responsibilities. Failure to manage these records correctly can lead to difficulty locating vital evidence or complete loss of valuable evidence, which can hinder the actualization of the university's mandate.

Therefore, the proper information governance is compulsory as a policy and must be in place to authorize officials to manage records. In this context, no records will be left in 'grey areas' as there is a clear distinction between records and non-records as well as categories of records (Azman et al., 2019)

2.3 Critical Factors for Implementing Information Governance

IG is a concept that combines a tactical method of managing, processing, controlling, maintaining, and retrieving information as evidence of organizational transactions. The description emanates from records management, where records are considered proof of the activities of an organization. IG concept comprises the process, policies, roles, metrics, and standards guaranteeing an organization to achieve its goals through the effective use of information (Gartner, 2018).



Fig 1: An Information Governance Framework (Muhammed et al., 2020)

Studies by Muhammed et al. (2021) and Smith (2015) found that funding, policy, expertise, technology, stakeholders, security, and enabling environment are crucial for the successful implementation of IG in organizations. However, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct our very own study to identify our specific issues and problems to develop an IG framework for University X.

New global legislation and regulations related to information, the fast creation and use of information in organizations, and changes in corporate governance gave rise to the need to clearly define a road map for IG, with a consistent definition and proper enclosure of affected disciplines and an implementation approach. According to Hagmann (2013), in the absence of a framework, the danger is that organizations rebrand existing records and information programs into an IG program.

3.0 Methodology

The study uses a single case study approach and follows the idea of Yin (2018), which suggests that case study research deals with an empirical that investigates a current phenomenon explored by a researcher within its real-life context. Rich context and lack of control over events are part of the characteristics of this research, which are the major characteristics of a case study, hence the decision to use the method. The purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents for the study based on their knowledge of records and information management and their duty schedules as the results of their long engagement with the university information management ecosystem. Similarly, this also goes with the idea of Yin (2018), who posits that one of the advantages of conducting a case study is the flexibility in choosing the research respondents based on the researcher's desired characteristics.

The case study was conducted using open-ended interviews as the primary data collection technique. The authors chose University X because of the diverse faculties in the university, the wide range of staff and their contributions of data contributed from University X to the parent university. The respondents are 8 employees representing different roles and levels from decision making to operational levels. Semi-structured interview method was used to enable a researcher to use proposed themes just like in a structured interview and concurrently ensure flexibility for the respondent to express himself freely on any issue raised during the interview. The study used analysis software using NVivo 12 to facilitate the interview analysis. The interviews involved questions on the records management (RM) practices and their implications for RIM in the universities. The study also shares its methodological approach with Phiri (2016), who studied managing university records and documents in the world of governance, audit and risk, particularly in its method that maintains choosing an appropriate site for case study research demands careful attention of the researcher's aims and objectives for conducting the research.

The respondents will be from the top management of the University X campus, inclusive of the University Rector, Deputy Director (Research & Innovation), Deputy Director (Students Affairs), Deputy Director (Industrial, Community and Entrepreneur), Deputy of Registrar (Administration & Human Resources), Deputy of Bursary, Deputy of Chief Librarian and Director of Facility & ICT.

The interview questions are designed in line with the research questions as below:

1. What are the weaknesses of current information management practice in University X?
2. How is the quality of information controlled in University X?
3. How information should be governed to harness the performance of University X?

4.0 Findings

Being the biggest in Malaysia, the University X is not only inundated by various functions and activities but also data and information materials that are acquired and generated from various transactions. As a result, many dedicated systems, portals and databases were developed as platforms to store and support the retrieval of information resources among stakeholders to meet their needs. However, the establishment of many information systems has resulted in an unbalanced information management ecosystem in the university.

4.1 Lack of coordination in the Organization of Information Resources

A myriad of dedicated information management systems developed to support the storage and retrieval of information is unavoidable as some information requires an exclusive repository. Too many of them, however, will make searching and access to needed information messy. Being the top executive of the university, the respondent has found that looking for the right information at the right time is sometimes troublesome. Among the symptoms of the problems cited are;

- The collection and dissemination of information are not well managed.
- Lack of integration between the systems available at the university
- Information links are not well planned on the website

"...we have too many information systems, registrar use their own, the bursary is on their own...confusing..." on another instance, the respondent indicated a lack of responsibility on the stewardship of information resources, he claimed, "...the assignment of responsibility in collecting and processing information and data is not spelt out and distributed...."

Hindsight, many information systems were developed to serve functions for specific entities, departments, units, and groups within the university. Undoubtedly, this exclusivity offers advantages to a certain extent, but on the one hand, it restricts the integration of information

systems offering data and information materials to the university's stakeholders. Hence, cutting off access to information and data supports their needs in making various plans and strategic decisions.

4.2 Critical Areas to Improve Information Governance in the University

4.2.1 Resources

People are one of the critical resources in the information governance ecosystem. Individuals with the right competency must be employed to undertake various functions in information systems and their development, information organization or classification according to values and categories that represent the functions and activities of the organizations. While competency is important, the clear assignment of responsibility in managing information resources is equal to it. Another is system resources which require the provision of hardware and software with a clear system and user requirements to support the management of information resources and their organization for efficient storage and retrieval.

4.2.2 Information Organization

Information, data and other related resources belong to various categories, nature, properties and values. The difference in the characteristics represents value, weightage, significance and context to different users and stakeholders. These differences must be organized, classified, or cataloged using the right protocol. The procedure for this process must be codified and form part of the university's information governance. The organization of information into rightful properties will help the assignment of context to these information resources for better management of information lifecycle, linkages, integration and appreciation of resources as the organizational assets.

4.2.3 Governance Provision in Managing Information Related Resources

Processes and procedures to realize the university's vision, objectives and outcomes in using the information as its critical assets to increase performance must be documented and approved. They will become sources of reference for guided actions.

4.2.4 Information Leadership

The head of the organization or department level must always identify information requirements to be incorporated into organization-wide policy, continuously evaluate the development of information resource management, and assess its impacts on the organization.

5.0 Discussion

In completing this paper, the researchers managed to interview only 1 respondent who held a senior position in the university. Due to the constraints, the findings are not comprehensive and did not cover the whole research. Nevertheless, it is found that there is a lack of coordination of information resources in the university such minimal integration of various information systems. In addition, assignment of tasks or responsibilities must be given attention as accountability of each employee must be clearly spelled out. Meanwhile, information requires proper classification to enable better governance for the benefit of the university. It is also discovered that information leadership is desperately needed to oversee IG in the university.

Further interviews will be conducted in completing this research. As referred to the interview that was conducted, it is found that the university appeared to take reactive measures when dealing with information management rather than taking proactive and strategic decisions. Actions tend to be specific to a particular area rather than in a broader sense of information management; they are exclusive rather than inclusive. As a big and progressive Institution, actions, initiatives, efforts and information infrastructure are sometimes built ahead of existing policies or procedures to govern them. It has resulted in uncoordinated information resources management and thus is ineffective in supporting the university's functions.

6.0 Conclusion & recommendation

The key aspiration of this research was to find out issues regarding the current records management practices in University X which is the essence of IG implementation. The purpose was to provide an appreciable records management solution that addresses records management challenges for the universities, specifically to safeguard and make the information readily available. Implementation of IG in University X can improve its performance particularly in terms of supporting decision making and daily operations. Other benefits of IG are better risk management and economic operation through improved information storage, dissemination and security of the information. It can also be a good benchmark for other institutions in implementing IG for the benefit of all. Limitation to the research is mainly due to getting more respondents within a limited time frame. Therefore, it is suggested that an in-depth study can be conducted in the future involving more key personnel in order to attain a clearer picture about information governance in the organization.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This research paper contributes to the field of Library and Information Science.

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