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Summer 6-12-2023

## ESSENTIALS OF RECORDS ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES

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Okeke, Oluchi and ANI, OKECHUKWU S. Bar, "ESSENTIALS OF RECORDS ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES" (2023). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 7799.

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# ESSENTIALS OF RECORDS ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES

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## ***Abstract***

*Records are vital documents that are so important to the owners. Managing and organizing them are very crucial for ease of access and use. This is because since they function as evidence of transaction, truth and others, they ought to be properly taken care of. This paper discusses records, its organization as well as management, the benefits and challenges of record management. The library and information centres are therefore charged with proper organization and management of the records.*

**KEYWORDS: Records, Records Organization, Records Management, Library, Information Centre**

## **Records**

A record is a documented object or written piece about something. It can be either a tangible object or digital information. Examples are birth certificates, medical x-rays, office documents, databases, application data, emails, etc. They are also said to be documents that are usually placed in a filing system for easy access and use. They function as evidence of activities and transactions. They include all the documents that institutions create or receive in the cause of administration and evidence of transaction. The International Standard Organization (ISO) in Ekere (2011), defined records as information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or persons in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business.

Some other definitions of records abound. Still in Ekere (2011), the International Council on Archives (ICA) Committee on Electronic Records, defined a record as recorded information produced or received in the initiation, conduct or completion of an institutional or individual activity and that comprises content, context and structure sufficient to provide evidence of the activity. In other words, it is simply defined as evidence of event which is usually a document regardless of the form or medium it is created, received, manufactured or even used by any individual, private, public or an organization in business transaction and or in pursuance of other legal obligations. Asogwa (2010) defined records as documented accounts of facts or events kept for future use in the management of any organization. According to the writer, some important records to be kept in the library include the library policy, statistical records, archival records, etc. the statistical records are referred to the quantitative measurements of facts, of events or situations. These statistics are kept for the purpose of serving as a supportive material that will be used for influencing the school authorities which also helps to show progress in the area concerned.

There are many uses of records. This is because they have great purposes they ought to serve to the owner(s). These uses according to Oduagwu (2000) include the following:

- They are used for transactions i.e. to conduct current business
- Used to guard against fraud
- To protect our right and accesses
- Used as evidence to recall past decisions
- To provide access to previous work
- To provide cultural context and research information
- Used as corporate memories of a nation.

There are also characteristics of records which will enable information seekers and users identify them easily. These characteristics according to Okeh (2018) are the following:

- It must be what it is meant to be
- It must be a reflection of true transaction
- It must be made available when needed
- It has to give full information required at a given time and period
- It should carry all that is required i.e. documentation of complete range of an organizations' businesses
- It must be effective in handling and specification to meet needs
- There should be no unauthorized access if properly maintained and handled.

### **Organization of Information**

In library parlance, organization means classification and cataloguing of information materials.

Organization of information can be said to be how information documents are arranged, kept, stored, preserved, packaged, etc. for easy retrieval and assessment. The way in which information is organized, that is, packaged, displayed, and developed, can play an important role in making that piece of information relevant to an information user. In library parlance, organization of information is done using the terminology called “cataloguing and classification”. In essence, organization means classification and cataloguing of information materials. These are the organization or arrangement of materials using the tools involved.

Information carriers (materials) are organized using the classification schemes which have outlines for every existing work. These classification schemes and their outline include the following:

- The Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme (DDC): this scheme was invented by Melvil Dewey who was born in 1851 and became an assistant librarian after graduating in 1874 (Aina, 2004). The first edition according to the writer was developed in 1876 as a classification and subject index for cataloguing and arranging books and pamphlets of a library. He used numerals for this outline. The outline is thus;

1. 000 Generalities
2. 100 Philosophy and religion
3. 200 Religion
4. 300 Social Sciences
5. 400 Language
6. 500 Natural Sciences and Mathematics
7. 600 Technology (Applied Sciences)
8. 700 the Arts
9. 800 Literature and Rhetoric
10. 900 Geography and History.

Each main class of the above outline is divided into ten divisions and each division into ten sections or sub divisions,

- Another type is the Library of Congress Classification Scheme (LC). This was initiated by Herbert Putnam between 1899 and 1920 when it was first published (Aina, 2004). The outline used alphabets in its classification thus

1. A General Works
2. B Philosophy, Psychology, Religion
3. C Auxiliary Sciences of History
4. D History: General and Old World (Eastern Hemisphere)
5. E – F History: America (Western Hemisphere)
6. G Geography, Anthropology, Recreation
7. H Social Sciences
8. J Political Science
9. K Law
10. L Education
11. M Music
12. N Fine Arts
13. P General Philology and Linguistics
14. Q Science
15. R Medicine
16. S Agriculture
17. T Technology
18. U Military Science
19. V Naval Science
20. Z Bibliography, Library Science

There are other classification schemes, but the most widely used are the above two. In organization of knowledge, the different arrangements, for example use of visuals with text, text only, text divided into smaller paragraphs or displayed in the form of one block, the nature of language used to compose sentences (simple versus complex), and the length of a document itself are all factors, among others, that determine the nature of organization and the relevance of information with the information need of a user.

Organization can also be defined as “an arrangement of roles, along with associated responsibilities and rights, in accordance with and around a central objective.” This is because; the development of an organization depends on a particular cause or objective. This objective is of such an important nature that it prompts the need to develop an entity to achieve it in a coordinated and determined way. This objective necessitates the development of an arrangement having people with well-defined roles that are relevant to the nature of the objective.

Needham (1974) opined that the essence of organization of knowledge (materials) is to facilitate retrieval devices which enables a user find a document which the author, title, and subject are known. The writer continued that it also shows what the library has by a given author, on a given subject or related subjects, and in a given kind (form) of literature. It also assists in the choice of a document as to its edition (bibliographically) and as to its character (literally or topical).

### **Records Organization**

Records are organized as they come or received using dates and titles. The way in which information is organized, that is, packaged, displayed, and developed, can play an important role in making that piece of information relevant to an information need. This is not different from records organization. Records are received, classed and arranged in their various groups as they come in. Example: An arrangement scheme for a school record

- A Legal matters
- B Financial matters
- C Staff matters
- D Student matters
- E Reports
- F Speeches
- G Minutes of meetings
- H Examinations
- I Continuous assessment
- J specific subjects
- K Prospectus
- L School equipment
- M time table
- N School calendar
- O Laboratory/workshop
- P Library/Resource Centre
- Q Extra Curricular activity
- R Building/grounds
- S Evaluation
- T Community relationship
- U Photographs
- V Non-print records
- W Counseling.

Records constitute the basic administrative tools by means of which the work of a government is accomplished. They contain evidence of financial and legal commitments that must be preserved to protect the government. The writer continued that indeed, archives are the foundation upon which government structure is built. Therefore, the modern archivist is concerned with the quality of the records he receives from a government office since he is anxious to have the integrity of records preserved. In essence, records of a given agency should be kept together as

records of that agency. This according to Ekere (2011) means that records are grouped or classified according to:

- Repository which is the total collection into few major and distinct categories.
- Record group which is a body of organizationally related records established on the basis of provenance with particular regard for the administrative history, complexity and volume of the institution or organization involved.
- Sub-group which is a body of related records within a record group.
- Series (or Class) which is the basic unit of administrative control of records and archives.
- File unit which is the unit in which individual items are grouped or categorized to facilitate filing in the correspondence series. This file unit also contain individual file letters, minutes series, etc. which could be arranged chronologically, alphabetically, topically, geographically, personally or organizationally.
- Document which refers to the individual items which may range from one page to several pages and are the smallest discreet unit in an archives/records management centre. It is usually a single record or manuscript item and filing here is commonly chronological, alphabetical or both.

Such records should be kept as far as possible under the arrangement given them in the agency in the course of its official business for effective ease of use. Also such records should be kept in their entirety without mutilation, alteration or unauthorized destruction of portions of them.

Example,

Manuscript of an individual	(record Group)
Biographical records	(Sub-group)
Legal papers	(sub-group)



Business papers	(sub-group)
Tax papers	(Series)
Receipts	(Series)

Records can be catalogued and filled in cabinets. Example, if it is a letter kept as record which is still in manuscript form, it can be catalogued thus:

MS 2000 – 7  
 ABDULLAHI, Musa  
 (Letter) 1999 Apr. 12. Jalingo  
 (to) S. Melinda, Mubi (Adamawa State) / Musa Abdullahi.  
 - 2p. on 1 leaf.

In English  
 Nigerian artist. Correspondence on Art exhibition.

Gift of Musa Abdullahi, 2000

1. Correspondence

To enhance and safeguard for future use in terms of learning and research, Records Storage Building are equipped with safety measures against poor environmental conditions, insects, rodents, moisture and temperature fluctuations, fire, flood, theft and sabotage (Kathpalia, 1990 in Ekere, 2000). All hazardous factors should be identified and prioritized. After such susceptibility analysis, an assessment is always made on identified risks that may be tolerated and on conditions for which immediate measures should be taken. All workers should be trained on hazards identified, emergency plans are prepared and drills regularly maintained. Scenarios are developed based on estimated disaster vulnerability of objects and library-archive materials, and such scenarios should address the use and enhancement of existing resources, intervention of workers and measures for the protection of objects. In scenario perspective, also documentation, conservation, preservation and transferrable to safer storage are -as of the objects damaged after the emergency/disaster and subsequent secondary disasters in accordance with the intervention of conservators are of essence.

## **Records Management**

Management is the achievement of organizational objectives which includes all the activities that facilitate this achievement. It entails the mobilization of organizational resources and enhancement of performance. Mary Parker Follett, an early management scholar, described management as “the art of getting things done through people” (as cited by Stoner and Wankel, 1986 in Afzal, 2012). This emphasis on people was also reiterated by Drucker and Maciariello (2008) in Afzal (2012), who defined management as “to make human resources productive. In management, there are variables involved. These variables are the following:

**Planning:** this is the first element of management process. It is the thinking process to determine the proposed course of action in any organization. It entails what, how, when, where, and who has to perform the work or things to be used, and all that. In planning, you are examining the future and drawing up plans of action. In planning stage in the management of information, you think of the type of tools, electronic gadgets and other equipment that would be efficient for the operation in your organization in other to get a proposed output.

**Organization:** - which is the second element of management processes provides suitable administration structure and facilitates execution of proposed plan.

**Staffing:** - this entails the process of employing efficient employees in adequate numbers who are capable of fulfilling the objectives of the organization. Every organization needs efficient, stable, and cooperative staff for the management of their organization.

**Directing (leading):** - it deals with guiding and instructing people to do the work in the right manner. In this stage, managerial roles are fully implemented, they have to work as leaders of their subordinates in other to achieve their objectives.

**Coordination:** - a manager must coordinate the work for which he is accountable for.

Coordination gives one clear-cut direction to the activities of individuals and department.

Coordinating brings unity of action in the organization; it means unifying and harmonizing activities and efforts.

**Reporting:** - this means keeping records of what is going on in the organization. It is through report that a chief librarian keeps the higher authorities informed about the performance and needs of the library by using record. They accumulate data which makes it possible to indicate how the organization or system is doing.

**Budgeting:** - this is the last element of management process. It is an effective management tool. Careful planning, accounting and control are necessary in budgeting in order to achieve your organizational goals. Budgeting is one of the systems of financial controls. It is usually based on estimated income and expenditure.

Therefore, after records' acquisition, the best practice is to manage it so as to have longevity and access to users. This means that the record should be stored, preserved, retrieved, etc. as at when due. This act of storing, preserving and retrieving information by users in the shortest possible time is known as record management. The person who manages the records is known and addressed as the "record manager".

Record management could be seen as activities that entail taking care of records in order to serve its purpose over a period of time. The act of storing, preserving and retrieving information in the shortest possible time is known as record management. Eze and Ani (2017) defined records management as a thing about controlling records within a comprehensive regime made up of policies, procedures, systems, processes and behaviours which together ensure that reliable

evidence of actions and decisions are kept and remain available for reference and use when needed. Smith (2002) in Eze and Ani (2017) sees records management as the systematic control of all records from creation through their processing, distribution, organization, storage and retrieval to the ultimate disposition. The International Standard Organization, ISO (2001) in Bosah (2018) defined record management as the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including the processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transaction in the form of records. Taylor (1991), in Ibrahim (1996) all in Eze and Ani (2017) stresses the need for organizations to manage their records in order to facilitate decision making. They are of the view that no organization can rely on the memory of its transactions. Meanwhile, Evborokhai (1990) in Eze and Ani (2017) was of the view that organizations will face serious problems if they allow their records to be mismanaged. The writer continued that organization should let their records staff know that their success depends on how well the information resources are managed.

Meanwhile, in the course of managing records, there are issues that need to be known. These issues are the following:

- Issue of identification: here if an item is presented as a legal record, it needs to be authenticated. Forensic experts may need to examine a document or artifact to determine that it is not a forgery and that any damage, alteration, or missing content is documented.
- Storing records: they must be stored in such a way that they are accessible and safeguarded against environmental damage as explained by Dike (2018).
- Circulating records: this is the act of tracking the record while it is away from the normal storage area. It can often be handled by simple written recording procedures.

- Disposal of records: this does not always mean destruction rather it can also include transfer to a historical archive, museum or private individual. This is because, destruction of it ought to be authorized by law, statute, regulation or operating procedure, and the records should be disposed of with care to avoid inadvertent disclosure of information.

### **Benefits of Records Management**

It is pertinent to note that every record serves a great purpose to the owner be it individual or organization. These great purposes are essentially, the benefits derived from record management. Therefore, records ought to be properly and carefully managed so as to serve these purposes. Good records management according to Eze and Ani (2017) enjoys the following benefits amongst others:

- It ensures timely availability of records for decision making. This is because many decisions which could have made tremendous impact on the social life of the people, have either been delayed or made impossible due to absence of records by poor records management practice.
- Public records are the solid ground on which the statesman can tread with security in the incessant toil of conducting the affairs of a nation. This is because records are believed to be the silent, impartial, reliable and eternal witness that bears testimony to the toils, misfortunes, growth and glories of people.
- It ensures the availability of records for the promotion of patriotism, accountability and good governance thereby engendering social transformation and continuity in administration.

- Records management guarantees social justices. This is because vital information that can establish the rights and obligations of individuals, organizations and institutions is contained and found in records.
- Documentation centre deals with material acquired from outside the organization which is also useful to the parent body since its information complements records.

### **Challenges of records Management**

Whatever that has advantage also has disadvantage. Records management is not an exception to this fact. These challenges however are usually man-made. The challenges include the following as mentioned by Iwhiwhu (2005) in Eze and Ani (2017):

- Inadequate knowledge of the life cycles of records.
- Poor awareness on the importance of records management in institutions.
- Difficulties in finding documents and or information needed to take decisions or respond to inquiry.
- Non-availability of records management programmes or policies on records.
- Lack of trained personnel handling and managing the records.
- Inadequate facilities for the preservation, storage and retrieval of records.
- Lack of filing manual/system
- Inadequate computers to manage the volume of records generated.
- Attitude of administrators towards records and the record management.
- Lack of records retention and disposition schedule.

### **Conclusion**

Records are vital documents that have valuable information in them. This information therefore, are of great importance to the owner(s) and or users. In essence, managing records as well as

organizing them should not be neglected. It needs to be carried out with the utmost scrutiny and carefulness. Record managers are encouraged to be more pertinent and meticulous in managing records. In the same vein, records organizers are also advised to carry out their duties diligently so as to serve their clients efficiently and practically best.

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