Records Management Policy in Enhancing Governance in Homa Bay County Headquarters, Kenya

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Abstract

Globally, records management plays major role in enhancing governance. The study objective was to examine the role of records management policy in enhancing governance at Homa Bay (HB) County Headquarters, Kenya. Target population comprised of 306 employees who are the custodians of records within the County Headquarters. Stratified technique was used to classify employees into strata. Yamane simplified formula was used to obtain a sample size of 174 respondents, which was proportionately distributed per department using random sampling technique. Structured questionnaires and interview schedules were pretested to determine validity and reliability and thereafter employed to collect data. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of IBM – SPSS (Version 23), presented in a table and interpreted in mean, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviation. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. The finding showed that records management policy was available in HB, though some employees were unaware. The study concluded that records managers in HB County should instill awareness among staff on the importance of records management policy. Based on the finding and conclusion, the study recommends, firstly, that HB records managers should ensure records management policy is properly documented and shared with all employees managing records with a view of increasing efficiency in the information flow thus enhancing governance and secondly, HB would identify areas of weakness in records management policy and focus on improvement.

Introduction

Records Management (RM) is an important part of information governance strategy. According to McKemmish (2013), records management is a continuous process that links the past and present records to be dependable. In this case, institutions need to recognize the importance of good records management policy as a component for effective and efficient operations. Records authenticity and availability can only be achieved when records management policies are observed. The RM policies define what information an organization should keep as records, procedure for managing those records, their retention period and procedures for ensuring secure destruction. Moreover, RM policies help organization to achieve its mission and compliance with government law. For these reasons, RM policies have been recognized globally as a critical tool that provides a vital ground in supporting good governance in many institutions under the assumption that its principles and values are appropriately implemented. International Records Management Trust (IRMT) (2003) emphasized that records management policies being one of the components of records management must strictly be observed by organization to meet organization goals. In concurrence with IRMT 2003, it is evident that whenever RM policies are in place, organizations are able to establish clear roles and responsibilities for records management, keep track of their records and facilitate information sharing among employees.

World Bank in 2009 analyzed the relationship between records management policies and governance in Nordic countries and concluded that proper records management policies in records keeping would lead to authenticity, integrity, accountability and transparency. Besides, sustainable development requires good governance which can only be achieved through equal resource distribution among citizens. It is through proper records keeping underpinned with records management policies that an organization can be able to keep track of any business transaction.

In the United States of America, Pember and Cowan (2010) contends, proper records management policy has contributed to good governance. This has created confidence among the citizens as they believe that information and services they get from the institutions are transparent and accurate. Looking at developed and developing countries records management system, studies revealed that developing African countries are still faced with myriad challenges on records management system such as lack of RM policies, inadequate skilled personnel and inadequate funds, etc. On the contrary, developed countries such as US established records management policies that have helped to curb challenges associated with records because they believe that good governance is achievable through good records management.

Mnjama (2003), notes that records management practices in African countries run in falling systems that has dragged behind the developments of county governments. As a result, the poor state of records management has contributed to increased corruption cases, inefficiency, and poor governance. The Management of Public Records in Kenya is governed by the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act, Cap19, 1965 which was later revised in 2003. The role of the institution is to amend rules and regulations that address effective management of records. Despite the efforts made by the government, a study by the Charter Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) (2013) Kenya, on the relationship between good records management policy and governance in public

institutions, emerged that records management policy was not given much attention. As a result, most organization operations were jeopardized due to missing records.

In Kenya, before the new constitution was promulgated in 2010, the current counties were managed under the county council and most of their records were in paper based format. With the devolved system, counties inherited most of the responsibilities from national government that called for proper records management system that would enhance governance in the counties. As a result, Management of Public Records (2003) and National Ministry of Information Science and Technology (2011) Kenya, continued to emphasize that counties should adopt sound records management system that would enhance governance.

Even though the government of Kenya is advocating for proper records management, the state of records management in the country remains a challenge due to lack of standardized practices and procedures. This was revealed in Auditor General Reports (2019) on Homa Bay County that indicated lack of clear documentation for evidence during auditing process due to poor records management. Consequently, Kenya Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) (2019), confirmed that there was no transparency on resource distribution and utilization in Homa Bay County. This was majorly reflecting on records kept. In addition, Infortrak (2019), also ranked Homa Bay County among the poor performing counties that have failed to underpin records to support daily functions and operations of business. Due to the concerns raised in the report, this study therefore was conducted to examine if the issues were as a result of records management policy at Homa Bay County Headquarters, Kenya. The objective of this study, therefore, was to examine the role of records management policy in enhancing governance at Homa Bay County Headquarters, Kenya. Based on the objective, the study specifically addressed the following research question: What is the state of records management policy at Homa Bay County Headquarters?

Literature Review

Records as a source of information are a basic resource which plays a vital role in the development of any nation. International Records Management Trust (2009) emphasized that government records management policy should be comprehensive enough to provide necessary security on information that ensures quality service to the stakeholders. Netshakhuma (2019), observed that good records management policy creates a conducive environment for effective management of records that promote information accessibility, sharing and dissemination.

Chibambo (2012) argues that decisions on future and current development plans by private and public institution entirely depend on the past and present records. Cushman, *et al.,* (2010) emphasized the need for effective records management policy in the enhancement of good governance characterized by accountability, transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness. To achieve organizational goals, a clear records management policy should be implemented to help prevent risks and curb challenges that might arise during records management. In situations where records management policies are not well defined, organization operations are likely to be compromised, thus poor governance is likely to be realized.

Shepherd *et al.* (2019) and Adu (2020) studies compared records management policy in both developing and developed countries and concluded that in developed

countries where proper records management policy is observed there was a positive effect on governance as opposed to developing countries. Luyombya and Ndagire (2020), investigated the relationship between records management policy and governance and concluded that lack of proper records management policy would always bring a major challenge in information handling. While all these studies may be correct, there are likely to be other factors that may influence governance apart from records management policy.

Ngoepe and Ngulube (2013) argued that all records developed in line with records management policy bring about effective and efficient use of resources. Mutero (2011), emphasized that since records provide a pathway in governance, developing records management system whether in the long run or short run by the records managers and archivists should take into account records management policy for such records to be effective and efficient. In reality, the effective and efficient use of resources depends on accuracy of information captured and stored, of which records management policy plays a major role by ensuring proper creation, classification, filing, storage, retrieval, disposal is practiced.

Giri in Guto and Jumba (2021), analyzed the relationship between records management system and accountability within the organizations, and found out that in organization where records management policy is not taken into account, accountability is likely to be compromised. In the same study, it was confirmed that good records management policy will be the foundation of good governance associated with credibility and transparency in the organizations. A study by Mnjama and Wamukoya (2007), revealed that records management policy at Moi University was not well developed, this resulted to cases of missing files, lack of records security, and poor storage facilities that have compromised records management within the university. It can be concluded from their work that institutions should take up the responsibility to develop good records management policy that would enhance good governance.

ISO 15489-1 (2016) pointed that records management policy on documentation and maintenance of records would ensure that records are accurate and reliable to provide a strong foundation in enhancing governance. Griffin and Kawa (2016) argued that records have a continuous use and uphold knowledge which should be governed with a well-defined records management policy. In fact, where RM policy is missing, dependency on records is likely to be compromised in enhancing governance. Well developed records management policy has a positive impact on accountability. Iwhiwhu (2011) observed that most universities in Nigeria, failed to develop good records management policy. As a result, the information obtained from such records lack credibility and cannot be used for accountability purposes.

Lee and Park (2018) observed that records management policy is very significant as it allows information sharing among users. Indeed, records contributes to sound decision making and act as a point of reference when they are properly managed. De Mingo and Cerrillo-I –Martínez (2018) pointed out that good records management requires experts with a good understanding of records policy with regard to reinforcing the existing records management system. This implies that lack of well-defined policy is likely to affect the disposal and transfer of records to archives.

Kargbo (2009) established that lack of records management policy was one of the major impediments in enhancing governance in the country. Reason being that most of the organization would not be able to ascertain the difference of current and noncurrent

records and provide adequate storage. Patti (2011) stated that good records management policy provides guidance and direction on records life cycle, right from creation. This would give a lee way to records managers to identify the types of records in the custody and provide security to them. When good records practices are carried out, there would be improved service delivery hence good governance.

Demingo and Cerrillo (2018) pointed that improved records management policy in South Africa promoted transparency, accountability and reduced corruption within the public and private institutions. Besides, Netshkhuma (2019) conducted a study on archives infrastructure at Mpumalanga province in South Africa and found that records management policy within the archives has positively contributed to the protection of information and citizens' rights. In addition, Mukred, Yusof and Alotaibi (2019) found that institutions with a well-developed records management policy have resulted to a good record keeping system thus enhancing sharing of information.

Kenya Government Records Service (KGRS) (2011) emphasized that to enhance governance in an organization, records management policy must be developed to ensure procedures, standards and legislation. Rotich, Mathangani and Nzioka (2017) recognized that in the absence of well-developed records management policy, governance will always be compromised leading to a lack of accountability, transparency and efficiency in the utilization of public resources. Ndenje (2011) argued that lack of records management policy constrains the organizations in capturing and accessing records in a systematic manner hence compromising preservation and availability of records and archives.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive research design that allowed study to thoroughly investigate the background of a research problem. The descriptive research design necessitated the combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain information about records management policy in enhancing governance. The study used Mixed Method Research (MMR) that involved the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. MMR helped the researchers with a deeper understanding to investigate on the issues related to records management and provided adequate information to explain records management policy in enhancing governance. The research was primarily quantitative due to the nature of the study, with the qualitative dimension playing a complementary role that enriched the research. Creswell (2014) points that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches helps to neutralize biasness of the data collected and accurate information is obtained. The study further employed a sequential explanatory strategy with the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Triangulation was used to integrate both quantitative and qualitative data that enabled interpretation of the combined findings.

The study was conducted at Homa Bay County Headquarters. The county is located in the former South Nyanza region of Kenya. The county lies between latitude 0015 South and 0052 North South of Equator and longitude 340 East and 350 West East of the Greenwich Meridian. The county has a population of 963,794 of which 48% are male and 52% female according to 2009 National Census with main inhabitants being Luos, Abasuba and other communities. The major economic activities are fishing and farming. The main cash crops are coffee, sugarcane, tobacco, while food crops are maize,

millet among others. Since devolution, the county has engaged itself in various economic and social activities intended to spur economic growth to improve the welfare of the people within and outside the county which requires proper records management stimulated with a clear records management policy.

In this study, the target population was 306 employees in Homa Bay County Headquarters, who were directly involved with records management, from which a sample size of 174 respondents was obtained using Yamane (1987) simplified sample size calculation formula. Stratified sampling technique was employed in classifying employees into six strata namely, Records Officers, ICT, Auditors, Procurement, Accounts and Human Resource. The sample size was proportionately distributed per department using random sampling technique.

Structured questionnaires and interview schedule were used to collect data. The reliability and validity of research instruments were achieved before and during data collection through pretesting data collection instruments at Uasin-Gishu County that shares similar characteristics as the study area. The study also attained reliability of data instruments by use of coefficient alpha to assess the internal consistency. Alpha value of .70 or higher merits the reliability of the research instruments. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed by aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V. 23.0), presented in frequency distribution table in form of means, frequencies and percentages, while Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using content analysis. This involved making inferences by systematically identifying specific characteristics of measure and objectivity of the respondents in answering the questions arranged as per the objective of the study.

Results

The aim of this paper was to examine the role of records management policy in enhancing governance in Homa Bay County Headquarters, Kenya. To achieve this objective, the respondents were required to rate their responses using a Likert scale; 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Undecided; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree. Their responses are presented in the Table 1.

Results from Table 1 indicate a mean of 4.08 and standard deviation of 1.171 that staff creating records in Homa Bay County are aware and understand county records management creation policy. Even though the respondents strongly agreed with the statement, the same statement, which was addressed to the interviewee who confirmed that:

> As much as many employees directly deal with county records, very few are aware about records management creation policy. It was further noted that there still exist challenges surrounding records management practices which was evident on the way employees handled records during and after business transactions in various offices (Interviewee A).

From the findings, it was apparent that Homa Bay County had failed to create awareness among the employees dealing with records on the importance of Records Management creation policy. RM policy guide employees' actions while creating and handling records.

In addition, on the statement that policy has been authorized and promulgated to all staff concerned with records management in the county, majority of the respondents agreed with a mean of 4.00 and standard deviation of 0.958. Unfortunately, it was further confirmed from the interview that less than 50% of the employees have embraced and followed RM policies. The respondent added that it could be as a result of negligence and lack of understanding among employees concerning areas addressed by records management policy.

Based on the findings obtained from the respondents, it was suggested that frequent training among employees in Homa Bay County must be put into consideration to educate on the need for and importance of records management policy, while managing records in order to achieve good governance that is characterized by transparency, accountability and responsiveness, being a reflection on the accuracy of records kept.

Consequently, respondents agreed with a mean of 3.89 and standard deviation of 1.154 on the statement that records management policy was properly documented in Homa Bay County Headquarters. Generally speaking, from the finding, good records management starts with policy that reflects on organizations needs which when achieved, contributes to good governance. Besides, the researcher further asked during the interview that if the policy was properly documented. Generally, the response was that:

> *Some of us are not aware about documentation of records management policy, and I might not be in a position to explain why those in charge have not taken the necessary actions to share the policy* (Interviewee C).

Based on the finding, the length of review period of records management policy is very important since it would allow Homa Bay County to plan ahead in case risks associated with records arises. Also, with the increased emergence and widespread of technology that has resulted to digitization of records, records practitioners should initiate and ensure effective RM policies that addresses Electronic Records Management (ERM) is in place.

Table 1: Employees Response on Records Management Policies

Policies	SD		D		N		A		SA		Mean	Std.Dev
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Staff creating records are aware and understand the county records management creation policy	10	8.1	3	2.4	10	8.1	44	35.8	56	45.5	4.08	1.171
The policy has been authorized and promulgated to all staff concerned with records management	1	0.8	12	9.8	14	11.4	55	44.7	41	33.3	4.00	0.958
Records management policy is properly documented	8	6.5	7	5.7	20	16.3	44	35.8	44	35.8	3.89	1.154
Senior records management officers designated to oversee the organization records management system are well informed of records management policies	11	8.9	8	6.5	18	14.6	41	33.3	45	36.6	3.82	1.248
All the custodians of records in various departments have records management policy that guides their actions when creating, receiving and handling records	10	8.1	9	7.3	16	13.0	47	38.2	41	33.3	3.81	1.210
Records Management Officers are assigned at all departmental levels with the responsibilities to carry out the records management programs in their sections	9	7.3	12	9.8	21	17.1	42	34.1	39	31.7	3.73	1.215
The county has policies guiding the employer or employees to declare records obsolete and destroy them	11	8.9	13	10.6	24	19.5	27	22.0	48	39.0	3.72	1.321

Key: SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree and SA –Strongly Agree
 Source: Field Data, 2020

Similarly, on a statement that Homa Bay County senior records management officers designated to oversee the organization records management system are well informed. Respondents with a mean of 3.82 and standard deviation of 1.248 agreed with the statement. However, 19(15.4%) in the same statement felt that senior records management officers designated to oversee the county records management system are not well informed. Reporting from the finding, officers lack records management skills that are required during the continuous use of records. It is evident that the collapse of records management system in many public institutions is due to lack of informed records management officers designated to oversee records management system. This is because they would not be able to realize challenges facing records management system in time and coordinate with the top management to come up with remedies.

In addition, respondents with a mean of 3.81 and standard deviation of 1.210 agreed with the statement that all the records custodians in various departments have records management policy that guides their actions when creating, receiving and handling records. Through interview, it was also confirmed that records management policy has never been shared. From the finding, ignorance among employees dealing with records, negligence of records and poor coordination among records staff is likely to occur since they lack awareness on records management.

Further, a mean of 3.73 and standard deviation of 1.215 was obtained which showed that majority of the respondents agreed that records management officers are assigned at all departmental levels with the responsibilities to carry out records management programs in their sections. One respondent through an interview acknowledged that:

> *Records management program especially E-records was still a concern since it had affected service delivery and efficiency in governance* (Interviewee E).

Although the respondents were in agreement with the statement, some still felt that officers have not achieved a standardized program that cater for both paper and e-records. Based on the findings, Homa Bay County should upgrade its records management system to ease records retrieval, dissemination and use as well as to identify and preserve records of vital, historical, fiscal, and legal value. Finally, on the statement that the county has policies guiding the employer and employee to declare records obsolete and destroy them, a mean of 3.73 and standard deviation of 1.215 was obtained which showed that majority of the respondents agreed with the statement. One respondent through an interview stated that:

> *Policies clearly define how records are supposed to be disposed, but it is rare for Homa Bay County to carry out disposal activity on any records due to fear of destroying vital records of continuum value* (Interviewee E).

According to the findings, most departments do not have records disposal programs and that is why they cannot practice records disposition. This has highly contributed to keeping obsolete records which has clog up offices and storage room.

Discussion

Records Management policy cannot be underestimated. Results showed that staff creating records are aware and understand the county records management creation policy. As Nengomasha (2013) contends, the management of records without a policy tends to render records management program unsuccessful. According to ISO 15489 (2016), each public office should take up the responsibility of developing and communicating records management policy to all its units in order to realize efficiency in records management. Yet, at Homa Bay County some employees still feel left out, because they do not have full understanding of what the record policies requires. It was arduous to inculcate a culture of commitment to records management staff since the policy document outlines the responsibilities and duties of each staff in records management system.

Results showed that records management policy was well understood by most employees dealing with records in Homa Bay County Headquarters, since it was authorized and promulgated. The finding is in line with Mnjama and Wamukoya (2007), who emphasized the importance of policy authorization to records managers in guiding their actions, while handling records. Kamatula (2010), asserts that records management policy benchmarks records management performance. In regard to the studies, good governance can only be achieved when proper records management is put into practice. As a matter of fact, resource distribution and utilization require proper documentation of records to help in accountability and transparency in governance.

Records management policy is important because it ensures that the organization is able to keep track of its records and have a clear plan for their retention and disposal. Results showed that records management policy was properly documented in Homa Bay County. This enabled business continuity and automatic workflow that contributes to good governance. The finding was consistent with the argument by Mukred, Yusof and Alotaibi (2019), who pointed out that document management demands policies to ensure records keeping requirement are addressed and met. Even though good records management starts with policy which reflects on organizations needs, it was also noted by some employees that they are not aware of RM policy documentation. This made it clear that such employees managed records with recourse which gave room for novices to Homa Bay County records system.

The findings showed that senior records management officers designated to oversee the organization records management system are well informed of records management policies. As Ezeani (2010) proffered, older information professionals entrusted with records are more experienced in handling records as compared to newly hired employees. Older professionals tend to understand the arrangement and description of organization's records right from creation stage to disposal stage. They also work closely with the organization management to identify confidential records and provide secure storage methods.

Results also showed that all the custodians of records in various departments have records management policy that guides their actions when creating, receiving and handling records. This was consistent with Netshakhuma (2019), who emphasized that custodians of records should have at their disposal records management policy whenever they are creating, receiving and handling records. In addition, the finding was also in concurrent with studies by Pember and Cowan (2010), Terer (2012), who pointed that

good records management can only be achieved if those dealing with records are provided with laid down policies to guide their actions.

Results showed that records management officers at departmental levels are assigned with the responsibilities of carrying out the records management programs in their sections. The finding was consistent with the study conducted by Hare and Mc Lead (2017), who found that records management officers efficiently develop records management program that would help in understanding and managing records in their custody. Owing to the finding, investing in records management software proves to be helpful if physical record management is in place. In addition, new records management technology can be assimilated with existing records system to make the system stronger. It is therefore the role of the RM officers to make sure that all employees dealing with records at Homa Bay County is conversant with the programs in the system to enhance free flow of information that would enhance governance.

Results showed that Homa Bay County has policies guiding the employer and employees to declare records obsolete and destroy them. As noted by Wolfowitz (2000), in situations where the policy defines who is supposed to declare records obsolete for destruction, employees or employers are not able to take advantage to destroy public records containing vital information which may create room for fraud. Reporting from the finding, any organization implementing records management policy must ensure that disposal policy is clearly addressed. Superseded records need to be destroyed in order to demonstrate accountability and consistency in records keeping, reduce risk to sensitive information and storage costs.

Conclusion

Although the results reported that, Staff creating records are aware and understand the county records management creation policy; The policy has been authorized and promulgated to all staff concerned with records management; Records management policy is properly documented; Senior records management officers designated to oversee the organization records management system are well informed of records management policies; All the custodians of records in various departments at Homa Bay County have records management policy that guides their actions when creating, receiving and handling records; Records management officers are assigned at all departmental levels with the responsibilities of carrying out the records management programs ; The county has policy guiding the employer or employee to declare records obsolete and destroy them. More than 50% of employees have a feeling that there is need for records managers in Homa Bay County to instill awareness among staff on the importance of records management policy and also offer records management short courses training to employees concerned with records management in order to achieve robust records management system that would lead to good governance characterized by accountability, transparency, efficiency, responsiveness and effectiveness.

Recommendation and Implication

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends the following; Homa Bay County records managers should ensure that records management policy is properly documented and shared with all employees managing records; All employees dealing with records should have knowledge on the laid down records management policies and be able to establish proper records management practices; The county should be able to follow records disposal policy guideline to enable destruction of obsolete records; Records management policy program should address both paper and electronic records and employees be trained for the realization of smooth flow of information which enhance good governance.

The study implications are: The study would help Homa Bay County to identify areas of weakness in records management system and focus on improvement; the study would contribute immensely to the existing body of knowledge by inculcating understanding on the role of records management policy in enhancing governance. It would also add scholarly knowledge on records management policy and provide avenue for future related research.

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