

Recordkeeping Practices: A Case Study of Public Service Department of Malaysia

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Abstract: *This study aims at identifying the current practices of recordkeeping and critical success factors of recordkeeping practices at one prominent government agency, namely the Public Service Department of Malaysia. The interview are used as a method of data collection. The findings will reveal the current recordkeeping and records management practices at Public Service Department of Malaysia. The data were analyzed and the results are presented in several sections includes background of Information Management Division, current practices of recordkeeping and critical success factors in recordkeeping practices.*

Keywords: Public Organization, Records, Records Management, Recordkeeping Practices

Introduction

In the era of accountability and transparency, a government must be able to demonstrate its good governance and delivering good services to the public. Providing trustworthy records is essential to provide evidence of their performance and to strengthen trust among the public. Effective recordkeeping provides a structure for keeping, maintaining and providing for the disposition of records and what is contained in them (Egwunyenga, 2009). Practicing good and effective records management is particularly critical to organizations because good quality records are very much needed to make right decisions and take actions on the mission of the organizations. Trustworthy and accessible records are authoritative sources of evidence and information that support and sustain the credibility and accountability of any organizations, be it the government or the private sectors (Aliza & Adnan, 2008).

Problem Statement

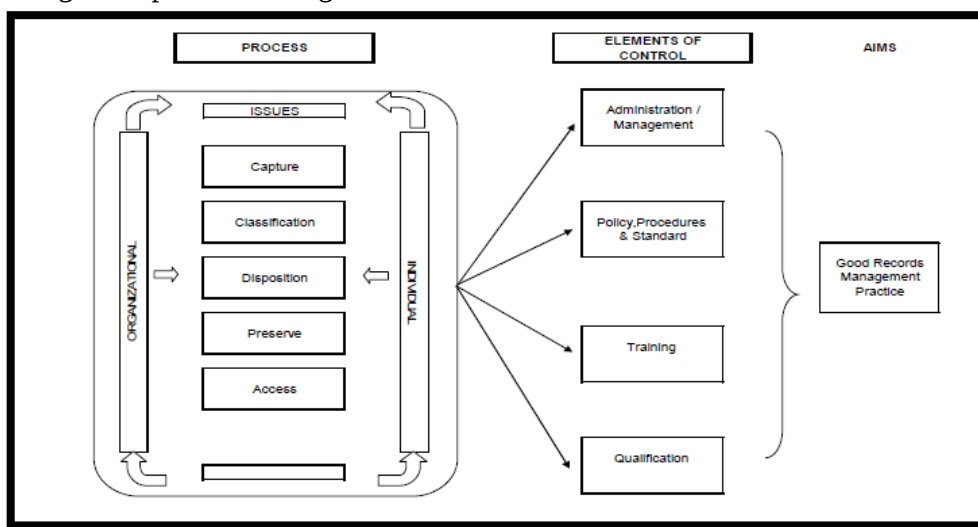
Records management has remained a neglected area of public sector organization. Recordkeeping has deteriorated so gradually that it has gone largely overlooked as a development issue. When development programs and regulatory systems are planned, it is essential that records systems should be strengthened. However, regardless of the evidence to the dissimilar, the availability of records is taken for established. Records are so fundamental to the concept of a democratic society that governments and donor organizations have tended to assume that records will be available to underpin constitutional arrangements and provide an institutional memory.

Public record is very important records that contain an evidence of each transaction done in the organization. In public organization, information or records are not regarded as an important resource that may influence the effectiveness of the institution. Although legislation regulating the management of records exists, there is ignorance on the part of certain officials, and that could have bad effects on the performance of organization and crucially on service delivery. There is, therefore, a need to improve the management of records at organization.

Related Literature

Records management in the public sector authorities is based on laws for examples National Archive Act 2003 and the practical work is conducted by using records management plans for archival purpose regulated by laws. The purpose of law regulations is to improve and regulate the use of records and information-seeking in an organizational archive regardless of any formed and structured by a records management plan. Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) point out that many business transactions depend on the proper creation and maintenance of recorded information. The medium on which the recording of information could be done may be paper, microfilm, audiotapes, videotapes, photographs, slides, or any computer-readable medium, such as computer tapes or disks, compact disks and optical disks.

Irwan (2009) in his study suggests different model regarding fundamental organizational and professional issues in records management. He described professional issues as elements of control in records management practices in organization.



**Fig 1: Theoretical framework of records management practices in Malaysia.
(Irwan, 2009)**

According to Irwan (2009), the process of records management whether organizational or individual can be influenced by elements of control which are professional issues in order to become a good records management practice. From the finding in his study, it shows that all the elements of control play a vital role in affecting process of records management in the organization. For example, appointment of 'Pegawai Rekod Jabatan' is being made regardless of level of education since it is up to the head of department of each agency, consequently it would affect the way records management issues are dealt with. Although the survey takes into consideration the training provided to the 'Pegawai Rekod Jabatan', still it may not be sufficient enough to comply with the records management requirements, hence a mechanism to enhance the knowledge of the existing 'Pegawai Rekod Jabatan' must be identified.

Critical Success Factor of recordkeeping practices

Caralli (2004) defines critical success factors as key areas of performance that are essential for the organization to accomplish its mission. Managers implicitly know and consider these key areas when they set goals and as they direct operational activities and tasks that are important to achieving goals. However, when these key areas of performance are made explicit, they provide a common point of reference for the entire organization. Thus, any activity or initiative that the organization undertakes must ensure consistently high performance in these key areas; otherwise, the organization may not be able to achieve its goals and consequently may fail to accomplish its mission.

In recordkeeping practices, identifying critical success factors is one of the important processes or activities to know what the factors that gives a big impact in achieving the good recordkeeping practices in the organization. Besides that, from identifying critical success factors in records

management in the organization, we also can know the gap and problem faces by staffs that are responsible in handling records and from that solution will be discuss to solve that problem.

Law and legislation

Burns, Ferris, Liatsopoulos (n.d) was argue that access to information has become an important part of legislation all over the world as it comes into its own, seen as a necessary part of any democracy. The laws associated with access to or freedom of information are intended to promote accountability and transparency in governments by disclosing their decision making process. These laws provide people with the legal right to know what their government is doing, thus making their government act in ways that better reflect the desires and wishes of their citizens. Irwan (2009) in his study state only 25% of the staff in organization aware and follow the requirements of any legislation or policies that involved records management in their respective agencies while the rest of them are not aware if the record management in their agencies fulfill any legislative or regulatory natures. From that we can assume legislation issues has a relation to the records created and management in the organization and it will be one of the critical success factors in recordkeeping practices.

Staff awareness

Staff performance can be one of the critical success factors in recordkeeping practices in organization because it will give a big impact. Findings from previous study, the staffs was informed about records management through several of sources, and the highest percent is from training of records management in use and policies and the majority of respondent agreed that the records need to be managed systematically. It shows the staff awareness in that organization regarding to records management. staff awareness could enhance the organization governance especially in their daily work as a training centre to achieve the organization's goals. However, there also have a small number of the respondents felt that records management did not enhance the organization governance. The level of awareness is very low, in terms of understanding of the function records management (Raja Abdullah and Roseline, 2011).

Policy, procedures and standard

Records management programmes operate within the framework of policies, rules and procedures that give guidance to practice. The purpose of these is to provide an environment conducive to proper records management. This is particularly important in an environment especially in public organization, where the responsibility for records management is distributed among the individual units with little or no centralized control. Policy is essential to provide broad guidelines in which procedures may be developed. (Chinyemba and Ngulube, 2005). In addition to policies, there is a need to have standards in place that identify best practices and benchmarks in order to achieve uniformity in practice. There is also a need for mechanisms to check compliance with policies, rules and procedures. One such mechanism would be the conducting of record management system audits.

Training

Training is one of the critical success factors in recordkeeping practices because it will help to enhance the capabilities of records management personnel in organization where the higher capabilities of personnel who are responsible in handling the records are crucial to the authenticity of records. So that, a series of training in record management should be ready and implemented in all organization. Wang Jian (2009) clarified training programs are designed to help the records management personnel equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills, including information technology skills, such as proper software and hardware maintenance training.

All organizations need to develop a programme of professional training for records staff. This will involve the Records Manager working with training and development staff. The programme should identify particular record management training needs in the light of the competency framework and arrange for those needs to be met, using internal and external training as appropriate. Training in record management policies and procedures should takes place at two levels which is professional development for records management staff and awareness of records issues and practices by all members of staff.

Staff qualification

The existence of qualified staff in records management ensures that the work is carried out efficiently. According to Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) as cited from Ugwunze (1992) and Uwaifo (2004) argue that records management had little prospect of success unless the services of trained and qualified personnel were employed. Staff qualification consists of the need of special skills, required knowledge, appointment of trained staff, function of the IT Officer, and top management support or commitment (Raja Abdullah and Roseline, 2011). It also discovers the experience of working records management itself. Based on the previous study showed more than half agreed that their organization have appointed qualified personnel with records management qualification to manage the records while the rest of them were not sure whether a qualified person or not have been given the task to manage records management.

Top management support

Top management support is a critical factor for the successful implementation of the recordkeeping practices in organization as it requires finance, policy approval, training program, infrastructure provision, etc. Raja Abdullah and Roseline (2011) was stated in his article which is the public organization is very fortunate in that the top management is committed to the recordkeeping practices with more than half of staff in the organization indicated full support by their management. However, the rest remained neutral on their management support and only a small percent believed that they never receive good support from their section head or top management.

Information technology development

ICT presents opportunities for recordkeeping in developing countries. It will enhance retrieval systems and online search facilities to name a couple. Opportunities for compact storage through electronic and digital storage devices are becoming more enticing to those responsible for records as they offer an alternative to bulky paper records that need a considerable amount of space for storage (Tale and Alefaio, 2005). During the construction of the digital records management system, it is important to try to integrate management and technology to make them support each other. Currently, technology-dependent mechanisms, such as the use of digital seals and digital signatures, are the primary strategies applied to digital records to guarantee their authenticity. Through the digital official record transmission system, digital seals are imbedded into digital records to prevent any intentional or unintentional changes to the records. Likewise, digital signature technology is used to ensure the reliability of the sending and receipt processes for digital records as well as the authenticity of the digital records in the process of transmission (Jian, 2009).

Methodology

The case study research strategy was chosen because the objectives was to identify the current recordkeeping practices and critical success factors of recordkeeping. The interview methodology is used to answer the research questions and the data gathering techniques included observation and interview. As the way of data collection procedures, preparing the time line should be considered as an important part to ensure that the data will be collected and analyzed within time frame.

Result and Discussion

The findings will reveal the current recordkeeping and records management practices at Public Service Department of Malaysia. The data were analyzed and the results are presented in several sections. The following were the findings gains from the interview have been conducted. The findings were presented in several sections includes, background of Information Management Division, current practices of recordkeeping and critical success factors of recordkeeping practices

Background Of Information Management Division

Information Management Division is the one important divisions in Public Service Department of Malaysia. The vision of Information Management Division is strived to be a leader in world-class human resource information management for the Malaysia public sector while mission of this division are as a main source o infrastructure relevant to public sector human resource management and optimizing the effectively use of ICT in human resource management to improve the quality of public sector services.

Current Practices Of Recordkeeping In Public Service Department of Malaysia

This part contains findings about several processes regarding recordkeeping practices in the Information Management Division of Public Service Department of Malaysia.

Record Classification System

The Public Service Department of Malaysia have several divisions and each division managed their own records and it is under the supervision its ministry and National Archives of Malaysia. Records are kept at each division itself.

"...in Public Service Department of Malaysia, records are managed by division under supervision of National Archives of Malaysia and 'Bahagian Khidmat Pengurusan' at main organization. Records are kept in the division itself..." [Interview]

In the Public Service Department of Malaysia, official matters are graded into four classifications such as "Rahsia Besar", "Rahsia", "Sulit", and "Terhad" as stipulated in the "Arahan Keselamatan".

"...we classify records based on "Arahan Keselamatan" prepared by National Archives consists of four level of records which is "Rahsia Besar", "Rahsia", "Sulit", and "Terhad"..." [Interview]

Filing System

The Public Service Department of Malaysia are assisted by the National Archive of Malaysia in preparing department records classification. This is to ensure that the filing system and record classification generated by the Public Service Department of Malaysia are based on the functions and activities of the departments because all records generated are related to every function and activities. When new records are coming or generated in the department, 'Pegawai Rekod Jabatan' will consult with 'Pegawai Rekod Jabatan' at 'Bahagian Khidmat Pengurusan' to get the file number by giving title and content of the record. Based on the finding, it show that all the filing system are controlled and monitored by 'Bahagian Khidmat Pengurusan' in the main organization.

"...when we received new record such as correspondence, we will check the file name whether the topic is already opened or not. If correspondence are related to the file that are already opened, staff will put that correspondence in the file but if there is no file related to the that correspondence, staff will called 'Bahagian Khidmat Pengurusan' and request the file number for the correspondence..." [Interview]

Record control schedule

The Records Management Policy Manual (2003) defines a records control schedules as a control mechanism of records other than the correspondence files. The records control schedule should consists of the schedule for paper-based records other than correspondence files, schedule for electronic records systems, schedule for microfilm records and schedule for audio-visual records. The Public Service Department of Malaysia only developed schedule for paper-based records because they do not fully implementing electronic records in their organization.

"...the record control schedule at Public Service Department of Malaysia only consist of schedule of paper-based records because we do not fully implement electronic record and we do not kept microfilm and audiovisual records..." [Interview]

Register of files opened

This register contains a description and opening dates of all files that were actually opened according to the subject provisions in the filing system. Public Service Department of Malaysia also has a register of files opened that recorded all the file has been opened in each division.

"...we have a register book to register all the file name, topic cover and date when file opened..." [Interview]

Register of files movements

This is a register where all files borrowed by the staff officials from the records office are recorded. This register exists at Public Service Department of Malaysia, however, it is not properly monitored as officials keep files in their offices for long periods. Ideally, files should not be kept in individual offices for more than three days because that defeats the purpose of centralizing records for easy access by all officials.

"...we have a register book to control all the movement of file and records within this division or sector. Any staff who want to borrow or use the file must register their name, file number and date of borrowing in the register book..." [Interview]

Disposal Program

The study shows that the understanding of the importance of disposal is most encouraging. The PRJ in Information Management Department mentioned they have disposal policies for all records created and based on that policy disposal program were done. Disposal program are involves staff in National Archives of Malaysia. Based on the finding, it is different from previous study that show disposal program is one of the major problems in the public organization and need to instill awareness of the importance of having disposal schedules in the agencies within public organization.

"...yes, we have disposal policies and we followed the policies. National Archives will assist us in disposal the records. That will help us in choose and appraise what record should be disposed based on their retention schedule...and the disposal program will be done in National Archive except for functional records where it is under the responsibilities of department itself to disposed after consultation with National Archive..." [Interview]

Records management and risk management

At the time of conducting this study, the Public Service Department of Malaysia's risk management programme was still at an infant stage and there was still no substantial information to determine whether records management is entailed in the programme or not. Each division was still to identify strategic risks affecting that particular division and that had not yet materialized. The Public Service Department of Malaysia has no recovery plan regarding to records management if something happen.

"...we don't have any backup plan in handling the records..." [Interview]

Critical Success factors in recordkeeping practices

Law and legislation

Records management system in the Public Service Department of Malaysia takes into account the legislative and regulatory environment within which the agency operates. Recordkeeping practices in the Public Service Department of Malaysia compliance with National Archives Act 2003. All the records management process done in this organization is based on National Archives Act 2003. National Archives Act is an Act to provide for the creation, acquisition, custody, preservation, use and management of public archives and public records, and for other matters connected therewith.

"...we manage records and document based on National Archives Act..." [Interview]

Besides that, the Public Service Department of Malaysia also manage records based in 'Arahan Keselamatan', 'Akta Rahsia Rasmi 1972' and 'Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Awam 2007'.

Staff awareness

Staff awareness on records management gained through other staff and training. All staff in the organization has been made aware of practices in records management and its issues. The Public

Service Department of Malaysia applied a rotation position where each staff (Penolong Pegawai Tadbir) will be rotated their position after three years. So that, they must know all the tasks related to them including records management.

Policy, procedures and standard

The compliance with policies, standard and procedures are vital to ensure records management programme can be implemented efficiently and effectively in organizations. This study revealed the existence of the guideline or national policy based on National Archives of Malaysia such as “Panduan Klasifikasi Fail Pejabat Awam”. Public Service Department of Malaysia also acted as the secretariat for the Public Service Department of Malaysia’s preparation for the compliance assessment of the MS ISO 9001:2008 Certificate by SIRIMQAS International Sdn. Bhd. It also acted as the secretariat for the Public Service Department of Malaysia’s preparation for the compliance assessment of the QES/5S certification by the Malaysian Productivity Corporation (MPC). Public Service Department of Malaysia also got the Certification for MS ISO 9001: 2008.

Training

For any department, the employees are its most important assets. Through proper planning of acculturation, employees can and do contribute successfully to achieving the mission and vision of the department. In Information Management Department of Public Service Department of Malaysia, training of staff dealing with the management of records is crucial in order to maintaining records management practices. Training on records management is frequently provided to ‘Pegawai Rekod Jabatan’ conducted by National Archives of Malaysia where Records Management Policy, Records Management Procedure Manual are presented to staff.

“...as a ‘Pegawai Rekod Jabatan’, I need to attend training and also workshop regarding to handling records and file conducted by National Archives...” [Interview]

Staff qualification

The appointment of ‘Pegawai Rekod Jabatan’ in the agencies in the Public Service Department of Malaysia is not based on qualification in any information management fields which could assist them to understand better about managing records in the agencies. The appointment of ‘Pegawai Rekod Jabatan’ is being made regardless of level of education since it is up to the head of department of each agency, consequently it would affect the way records management issues are dealt with. There are no consistent selection criteria in choosing the right personnel to hold the position of ‘Pegawai Rekod Jabatan’. Although the study takes into consideration the training provided to the ‘Pegawai Rekod Jabatan’ but still it is not sufficient to comply with the records management requirements, hence a mechanism to enhance the knowledge of the existing ‘Pegawai Rekod Jabatan’ must be identified. The finding from these questions will allow the study to make a justification on the issues on how the training would enhance the efficiency of records management in the organization. Designating a specific individual to be responsible for managing the overall organizational records will be an issue on this study.

Top management support

Top management support is a critical factor for successful recordkeeping practices as it requires finance, policy approval, training program, infrastructure provision, etc. The Public Service Department of Malaysia is very fortunate as its top management is committed to the management of records participant indicated full support by approving records management projects.

Information technology

Records management in the Public Service Department of Malaysia also influenced by development of information technology. It is because the Public Service Department of Malaysia develops system in managing records. The most important system anchored by the Public Service Department of Malaysia regarding records management is *Human Resource Management Information System* (HRMIS) where this system is responsible keep all information and records of public servant and provided many services to regarding to human resource management. It shows that, the Public Service

Department of Malaysia consistently updates the use of ICT but electronic records are not given adequate attention.

Conclusion

Recordkeeping practices in the Public Service Department of Malaysia are satisfactory and it still needs a long way to improve its present situation. It is important to appoint someone with knowledge if not qualification in records management, as 'Pegawai Rekod Jabatan'. It is evident that trainings provided by National Archives of Malaysia are useful for 'Pegawai Rekod Jabatan' to facilitate them in managing records. Conventional records are managed according to the guidelines by the National Archives of Malaysia but this is not extended to electronic records. It would be beneficial to the Public Service Department of Malaysia to initiate electronic records management initiative to strengthen its recordkeeping practice which in then improve the performance of the Public Service Department of Malaysia as a whole.

Based on findings, it can be concluded that records management is receiving the attention it deserves at Public Service Department of Malaysia because top management concerned with the recordkeeping practices by improving system that are used in managed the records to ensure it can be managed effectively. It shows that recordkeeping practices are receiving the attention from Public Service Department of Malaysia. This study also revealed the problem associated with recordkeeping practices in Public Service Department of Malaysia which is staff cooperation. This attitude actually will affect the effectiveness and efficiency of recordkeeping in organization. In its endeavours to improve its records management practices, it is proposed that Public Service Department of Malaysia consider the findings and recommendations of this study.

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