

Chapter 16

Preservation of Recorded Information in Public and Private Sector Organizations

Nathan Mwakoshi Mnjama
University of Botswana, Botswana

ABSTRACT

The long-term preservation and accessibility of business records is often not accorded the attention that it deserves. Yet, records are a major organizational resource needed to support the current business of the organization as well as retaining the verifiable evidence of an organization's past programmes and activities. Records also serve as tools of accountability, transparency and good governance and provide reliable evidence in organizations' transactions and activities. The long-term preservation of records ensures that the organization is protected against costly litigation and that its interests and those of its employees are protected. This chapter lays emphasis on the need to preserve organizational records, the challenges facing preservation activities in the public and private sector organizations, the challenges of managing and preserving electronic records and proposes strategies for addressing these challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Ricks, Swafford and Gow (1992, p.3) defined organizational records as “All books, papers, photographs, maps or other documentary materials regardless of physical form or characteristics made or received for legal and operational purposes in connection with the transaction of business”. As can be seen from this definition, organizational records may be in any form or medium and are the evidence of the transactions taking place in the course of organizations activities. Records are a by-product of organizational activities and that document the activities taking place in the organization. For this reason, these records need to be managed if at all they are to remain available and verifiable evidence of these transactions. The profession that is responsible for the management of organizational records is records management. ISO 15489(2001) defined records management as “The field of management responsible for the maintenance, efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition

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of records including the processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about the business activities and the transactions in the form of records". As stated by ISO 15489 (2016, p.1), managing records includes "taking appropriate action to protect their authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability as their business context and requirements for their management change over time."

However, the effective management and utilization of recorded information whether held in public or private sector organizations is predicated upon its proper management and protection against the ravages of nature, environmental considerations as well as careful storage and handling. More often than not, staff time is wasted in searching and collecting information which ought to be readily available in the organization. Frequent loss of valuable data and recorded information, unauthorised access to information, total destruction of valuable records and data is often unreported with dire consequences to the organization. Lack of organizational policies and procedures, inadequate storage facilities and lack of qualified and competent staff are often factors that prevent the proper care and preservation of recorded information in business organizations. Everyday care as well as long term preservation of the organizations' corporate memory is often left to junior officers with limited knowledge and resources. Perhaps the only times when issues of how the organization manages its records are considered, is when the required information cannot be located or when the organization is faced with a court case or a disaster such as fire or flooding. This chapter commences with a discussion on preservation and then proceeds to discuss the reasons for preserving business records, the challenges of managing business records both paper and electronic and possible strategies for ensuring that business records are managed and preserved so as to remain authentic and reliable evidence of the past.

PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION

According to Dureau and Clements (1986, p.2), preservation includes "all managerial and financial considerations including storage and accommodation provision, staffing levels, policies, techniques, and methods involved in preserving library and archive materials and the information contained in them". They further defined conservation as "those specific policies and practices involved in protecting library and archive materials from deterioration, damage and decay, including the methods and techniques devised by technical staff." Adcock (2016) explained that "preservation specifically means the provision of an appropriate level of security, environmental control, storage, care and handling, that will retard further chemical deterioration and protect library material from physical damage" (p.4). There is a clear distinction between preservation and conservation. Adcock (2016) sees conservation as the "specific practices taken to slow deterioration and prolong the life of an object by directly intervening in its physical or chemical make-up. Examples would be repairing damaged bindings or deacidifying paper" (p.4). As can be seen from the above definitions, the goal of preservation is to prolong the useful life of documentary heritage and ensure the accessibility of such collections by government agencies, institutions, business organizations and the public at large (Forde, 2009). This involves putting in place measures in order to minimize or reduce the deterioration of documentary heritage, and thus ensure that it remains accessible over time. Conservation on the other hand mainly focuses on the specific interventions that are taken to ensure that the documentary heritage remains accessible after deterioration has already begun to take place. This chapter focuses on preventive measures that organizations may put in place in order to ensure the long term preservation and enhance the continued accessibility of their information resources over time. No attempt has been made in this chapter to describe or discuss conservation or restoration mea-

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