

Use and Management of Email as Records in African Universities: Perspectives From Selected Librarians' Use and Management of Email as Records

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The chapter examined the management of email as records in African universities from the perspective of selected librarians. Data was gathered from interviews conducted for the librarians and their deputies along with analysis of related documents. Findings revealed that email is a record and therefore should be managed the same way other documents recognized as records in the universities are managed. The methods African universities are adopting in the management of email as records include capturing in an electronic document records management systems otherwise known as (EDRMS), print and file as attachments, headers details, and other appropriate metadata to the paper based on recordkeeping system, unaltered, classified, accessible, and readable for longer period.

INTRODUCTION

It is no longer news that development in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) has opened up many ways of communication, interaction, conversation, collaboration and exchange of ideas. Among these are social media including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Instant messaging, Electronic mail, Chat service, software, digital images, digital video, video games, web pages and websites, social media, digital data and databases, digital audio such as MP3, and electronic books. There are others such as computer programming, teleprocessing, graphic design, photography, and audio and video production. Examples of those used every day include mobile phones, television, radio, and of course the Internet.

Electronic mail usually denoted as e-mail is one of the most used ICTs by organisations including educational organisations such as universities. It is widely acknowledge that the E-mail streamlines processes and transactions, facilitates information exchange, increases the quality, speed and productivity of the employees and strengthens relationships among the university stakeholders (Quaresma, Da-Silva, & Marreiros, 2013). In a similar dimension, Leeds Beckett University (2017) added that email can be an effective way of sharing information and managing work across a large organisation.

Email and other forms of electronic messaging are important and much-used services within most universities in Africa. Email and messaging services are provided by the University to support its primary purposes of education and research and their associated functions. When used properly, email and other electronic messaging support efficient and effective business processes. As noted by the University of South Wales (nd*), email is now used as the main business communication tool across the many organizations, replacing traditional paper memos and telephone calls (BS ISO 15489:2001). As email can store a mixture of ephemera and records, it is essential that any email records are identified and retained with other formal business records so that they are managed as records. This ensures that an audit trail of a university's business is maintained, server space is used efficiently and records are only retained for as long as necessary to meet legal and business requirements according to the University Records Retention Schedule.

In Africa, all emails using University systems are the property of the University and may be liable to disclosure under the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act. Emails can also be used as evidence in legal proceedings. Managing emails properly will make it easier to locate information in order to comply with Data Protection and Freedom of Information requests and reduce the risk of damaging information coming to light. Not managing emails as records will lead to important emails being lost creating difficulties in accounting for decisions and actions taken.

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