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The Management of Staff Records at Delta State University Library, Abraka, Nigeria

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Introduction

Information recorded in paper and electronic files help managers, particularly chief executives, to direct, control, communicate, plan, formulate policies, and make decisions (Uwaifo, 2004). The availability of records is crucial in attaining organizational goals. Perhaps more important is the proper management of these records. To be of maximum value, records must be organized and properly managed.

Records management practice in Nigeria has a number of problems. They include insufficient skilled and experienced records management personnel, low priority of records management in the scheme of things, and insufficient funds (Afolabi, 1991). There is the need for records management in Delta State University Library; it will help in planning, decision making and implementation.

Objectives

The objectives of this study specifically include:

- To determine the components of the records management operation
- To get information about the filing system used in records management
- To find out how records are stored and made secure
- To investigate whether the library has a retention/disposition schedule
- To understand the calibre and qualifications of the records management personnel
- To suggest improvement in storage and retrieval of records

Literature Review

As an organizational resource, records serve many functions in the operation of an establishment such as a university library. Records represent all documentary materials such as correspondence, forms, reports, drawings, maps, photographs, and appear in various physical forms, e.g., paper, cards, microfilm, tape, CD-ROM, etc., which can be preserved for short or long periods.

According to Popoola (2000), what actually keeps the civil service going in any modern system of government is recorded information called "records," which are used for planning, decision making, and controlling. The need for a records management programme in all organizations cannot be overstressed in the digital age.

The purpose and essence of any record system is the right information in the right place in the right order, at the right time for the right person at the lowest cost. For this feat to be achieved, an integrated records management programme is needed (Baje, 1998). Enwere (1992) argues that the unintegrated records management programme in Nigerian public service has led to inefficiency in administration and to the loss or unavailability of vital information needed for decision-making.

As records management developed, it has also incorporated principles integral to information science as "the means of processing information for optimum accessibility and usability, concerned with the origination, collection, organization, storage, retrieval, interpretation, transmissions, transformation and utilization of information" (Vakkari and Cronin, 1992). Such principles are adopted by records managers in seeking to enhance the access and use of records.

Stressing the use of technology in records management, McDonald (1995) opines that "in developing record keeping solutions, it is necessary to understand the evolution that is taking place in the use of technology." The application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to the management of records therefore, will go a long way in making such records accessible and usable.

Employee records may be defined as "record that contain initial application forms, results of physical examination, interviewers' notations, test scores, periodical appraisals, transfer and promotions, disciplinary actions, releases and retiring wages, salaries, taxes paid, contributions and similar items" (Soveign, 1984). Some or all the following information may be also included in an employee file: full name, address telephone number, age and sex, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, membership in trade union etc. In many organisations these records are poorly organized and under-utilized despite the vital or important information contained there. Emerson (1984) argued that personnel records pose a particular problem because of their "bulk, longevity, and sensitivity."

Professional literature on archives and records management pays little or no attention at all to the subject of managing personnel records even though these files are substantial. In comparison to financial records, which have clear retention periods, personnel records do not seem to have well developed retention period.

Historical Background

The origin, growth, and development of the Delta State University Library is itself the history of the university. The university took its roots from the defunct college of Education, Abraka, and so has the library. The Delta State University Library started as an integral part of the defunct College of Education, Abraka as the college library on 4th February, 1969. The library was initially located in one of the residential quarters along the road leading to the Abraka Hall in Campus II with a branch library in Campus I.

The college library was relocated to the present building and commissioned in March 1980. It had a collection of about 23,704 at the time of commissioning. During this period the library had three basic divisions: Administration, Technical Services, and Reader's Services. The library served the Temple University students, degree students of the University of Benin, as well as N.C.E. (National Certificate of Education) students of the then College of Education.

In 1985, the College was upgraded to a campus of the then Bendel State University. The transformation of the College into a campus of a university had a positive impact on the library. The library now has over 62,432 volumes of books and 295 journal titles and other non-book materials.

The library is in the first stage of being computerized. The X-LIB software is being used and a training programme is being carried out for staff. Records that are acquired by the library are initial application forms, interviewers' notation, appointment letters, confirmation letters, redeployment letters, annual leave forms, maternity leave letters, queries, acknowledgement letters, permission letters, minutes etc.

Research Methodology

The population of this study consisted of library staff. A total of fifty staff were used with concentration on five staff who work directly with records. The Delta State University Library generates and keeps several kinds of records, which include personnel records, the focus of this study.

The respondents include 10 senior staff in addition to the Personal Secretary to the University Librarian, who is the administrative head of that office, as well as the Assistant Chief Executive Officer, who is in charge of the junior staff in the Library. Other staff used for the study are clerical officers.

Data were collected through observation and interview. Personal interviews were conducted with the all respondents and particularly with those in charge of records in the library.

Presentation and Analysis

The personal interviews were carried out with the five staff when asked if there were records being created and how are they created.

The Delta State University Library creates, maintain, and use records for their daily administrative and other purposes. Theses records include bulletins, forms (leave, etc.), queries, reports, letters (admission, appointment, acknowledgement, confirmation, permission, sick leave, etc.), as well as correspondence from other departments of the university, minutes, records of acquisition, accession list, catalogue cards, to mention but a few. The process of computerization of library records is underway, now that library collections have been automated. Some records are already in electronic form.

Level of Professional Training

Respondents range from clerical to Administrative/Executive Officer who handles or administers the records. Though they have some form of qualification that is appropriate to their position, none of them have professional training in records management or archives administration. As a result, they lack the professional skills and competence required to manage the existing paper-based records, not to mention their ability to manage electronic records, which will soon be the major source of records in the library.

Table I: Personnel and Training

RESPONDENTS		PERCENTAGES
Management	2	6.67
Clerical	8	26.67
Records/Archives--No Training	20	66.67
Total	30	100

Record Maintenance and Use

One important aspect of records management is the need for the created records to be adequately maintained for use (Uwaifo, 2004). There is the need for proper storage medium, filing procedures, so as to facilitate quick and easy access to the record when required. Library storage facilities for records include wooden shelves/rack, steel cabinets, drawers, catalogue cabinets, files, cardboard boxes etc.

The emphasis in filing systems today is on fast and accurate retrieval of stored information. Most business organizations in developed economies and they have invested seriously in appropriate file indexes. The use of a good index guarantees fast and accurate retrieval of information.

The only maintenance procedure the library practices is fumigation. There is no fire extinguisher in the records office. The records under study are open to the public with restrictions. Access is restricted to records for current or retired staff. Upon the demise of a serving staff member or pensioner, the records might also be open to the family of the deceased (next-of-kin).

Major components of record maintenance include;

- Filing
- Retention/Disposal
- Protection etc.

The filing system is alpha-numeric filing. The filing aid used is register and index. Two clerical staff receive the record/file and another files it. Table 2 is an example of the filing system.

Table 2

File Name	File No
Vice-Chancellor	Delsu/lib/1
University Librarian	Delsu/Lib/2
Registry	Delsu/Lib/3
Bursar etc.	Delsu/lib/4

The files for departments and unions are numbered according to how they are received.

Table 3

File Name	File No
Bookshop	Delsu/lib/22
NASU	Delsu/lib/23
ASSU	Delsu/lib/24
Health Centre	Delsu/lib/25

Personnel files are numbered alphabetically.

Table IV

File Name	File No
Adame Ben	LP/37
Ado Prince	LP/54
Agaga Joy	LP/113

LP = Library Personnel file.

The numbering is not consistent because some staff have withdrawn from service, some have transferred to other departments, some have passed on, and some have retired. When the file is full or bulky, another file is opened.

Retention and Disposal Control

There are separate shelves for semi-active and inactive records. However, the records are managed manually. Files for dead staff (inactive records) are closed and placed on the inactive shelves. The same is done to files of staff who have transferred to other departments. The semi-active and vital records are kept in file cabinets. It was observed that only one of the cabinets is labeled 'P' for personnel file in all four cabinets available for personnel records. This makes for difficulty in the retrieval of personnel records since other documents are also kept by the staff administering the records.

Due to lack of maintenance and long use, some of these cabinets are rusting and very dusty, with bad locks. All these endanger the life of records. Some files are lying on top of the cabinets due to lack of space. A closer look at these files reveals that they are no longer active. Since there is no inventory, no record appraisal, no retention/disposition schedule, there is confusion about what records to dispose of. As a result, there is time wasted in record retrieval, mix-up and chaos in the entire system of files and records.

Many organizations have disintegrated or folded up due to careless disposal of their records. However, some business establishments retain virtually all their records, with the result of an information explosion, overcrowding, wasted space and equipment, and difficulty in retrieval of vital records. Omenyi (1997) observes that most institutions fail in the keeping and management of records.

Records are now being managed electronically. Electronic records management is an aspect of the computer revolution which tends to be under-appreciated by the general public, and even by many librarians and information scientists (Oketunji, 2002). Many corporate and government records that were once kept on paper now exist only in electronic form. The replacement of paper records by electronic records leads to ease of access by those with the pertinent software and hardware tools. Database systems can be used to handling records. He recommends a sophisticated database system; the rapid processing power of the computer is needed for automatic storage and retrieval.

It should be noted that for records to be adequately cared for, separate building and storage facilities have to be provided. There should be a secure room or a vault for vital records. Creating records without proper plans for their maintenance leaves the records in shambles, which causes chaos in an organization (Iwhiwhu, 2005).

Storage Facilities and Security of Records

The record room/office where the library's records are kept is damp due to the location of the office (in the basement of the building). This can lead to mould, which endangers the life of the materials. The lighting in the office is natural light. There is an erratic power supply. Though there is a standby generator, it is not often used due to the high cost of diesel fuel. There is air-conditioning in the office but due to the fluctuation of electricity, the temperature and humidity of the storage area is not constant. The university library does not have automatic security/protection systems. Only restrictive methods are used to safeguard records from theft and mutilation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The work which reflects on records management in Delta State University shows that there is no record retention and disposal schedule, there is a cumbersome filing system as a result of the lack of a filing procedure manual, and there are no good cabinets. There are limited storage facilities, hence some files are kept on top of the cabinets and floor.

The staff in charge of records are not trained in records management or information technology. Proper records management practices are not in place.

Worst of all, there is no fire extinguisher.

The following are therefore recommended for a good records management of Delta State University Library.

- There should be record retention/disposal schedule instead of closing files when they are full and opening another volume irrationally.
- There should be a filing manual to avoid the cumbersome filing system being used presently.
- The records should be computerized.
- There is need for adequate storage facilities for proper management of the records and avoid files littering about.
- Constant air-conditioning is recommended to maintain a constant temperature and humidity to prevent mould growth and other organisms.
- There is need to employ staff who are trained in records management, or the existing staff should be given training through workshops and seminars in records management.

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