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Records Management of the MSU-Main Campus: Employees Observations

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Abstract

The study aimed to elicit information on the records management practices of the records officers in handling the records of the Mindanao State University, Main Campus, as observed by selected faculty members and staff. Slovin's formula was used to identify the 363 participants out of the 3,996 employees of the Campus. Purposive sampling was utilized in this study. Findings of the study revealed that based on the employees' observations, the records of the Main Campus are managed. However, participants believed that the records officers lack the necessary skills in handling records. Top administration support is of utmost importance to have a good records management by sending records officers to seminars/workshops and other trainings on records management. Moreover, classification schemes used in records keeping in the different offices need to be examined to ensure the security of records; hence, digitization of records is suggested.

Keywords: Records Management / Digitization / Mindanao State University /Main Campus

Introduction

The role of information in people's lives, according to Yue (2011), has been becoming more and more essential with the fast development of science and technology. It plays a key role in the progress of an enterprise to efficiently deal with the network business information. The rise of information brought some problems to people when it brought so many conventions. People and enterprises faced the great challenge of information process_ how to control the increasing information, how to take full advantage of the information gathered, and how to get the right message from the mass of information. Nowadays, people pay more and more attention to information storage and retrieval, which explains why every institution badly needs managing records in order for the records to be stored well and retrieved easily.

Wang's (2010) study entitled, "A Study on Information Retrieval Based on Situation Unit for Question Answering System" showed that with the increasing amount of information on the internet, people's requirements to information retrieval are also increasing, from the initial web page searched by inputting keywords to natural language retrieval through inputting the question sentences in natural language instead of keywords, and up to the direct answer output

corresponding input questions sentences in natural language, namely, the implement of question answering system (QA system) which is a new generation of information retrieval systems. The search showed that the QA system required generally targeted sentence groups, sentences, phrases, and even words at a fine-grained level, rather than the traditional information retrieval one which only targeted the entire document at a coarse-grained level. Therefore, information retrieval technology in the QA system is naturally different from the traditional one.

The two authorities, Yue (2011) and Wang (2010), emphasized the importance of information storage and retrieval, and identify technology as network storage. One information or document that has always been important in any organization is its records_ organization and its employees.

Records, according to Pan (2010), were created during the organization's business activities and management processes, recording and reflecting the organization's business activities. Records are not only necessary information resources but also valuable knowledge assets. However, at present, in many organizations, a good number of records are increased every day, and problems of records management are also severely increased. In an era of a knowledge-based economy, records management seamlessly drives and integrates into a business flow, records flow, and knowledge flow towards business-driven, knowledge-oriented, dynamic continuity management, and proactive management. Such value-added services and asset management would help organizations to avoid risk and prevent loss of preservation, loss of trustworthiness, loss of use, and loss of control of records.

Washington's (n.d.) study supported the above-stated study when he stated that records management is the direction and protection of information that is of value to organizational operation during the information's useful life. Effective records management results in savings through reduced labor and material.

Yi (2011) explored the fundamental theories and theoretical study on records management, reviewed the practice development on records management outsourcing abroad, drew on studies about models for records management, and reviewed the practice and studies on archives business outsourcing and records management outsourcing in China. A corporate model of records and archive management developed and integrated research in this field in China and designed business modules for outsourcing.

Similarly, Wang (2010) also designed a storage and retrieval system that supported the recording and the playback of multimedia data from a secondary storage device. However, the database to be designed should not only focus on the searching and storage part but, most importantly, on the preserving part.

Records management should start as soon as possible before it becomes difficult to manage, and to preserve all the records submitted to the office; for this would surely benefit all constituents. One way of managing records is to organize and make sure that records are well-preserved for future use. Preservation standards play a significant role in archives management standards. With the development of society and the extensive application of information technology, archives preservation is confronting tremendous challenges for preserving recorded

materials and information content. Nowadays, archivists, around the world, call for the standardization of archives preservation and pay more attention to system construction of archives preservation standards. To improve the standard traditional-carrier archives preservation system, information technology standard has become the mainstream of standardization for the preservation of archives in developed countries such as Japan, America, *etc.*

Well-organized and well-preserved records are the benefits that the organization can derive from digitization, as shown by the findings of Yang (2009). He shared that with the development of information technology and the further improvement of archives management requirements, the archival digitization in the theory and practice has become one of the hot spots in recent years.

The goal of digitization initiatives for Africa, according to Brendan (2011), was to develop interoperable and sustainable resources, which can be an institutional asset. One important aspect of the digitization initiative for Africa was a plan to ensure long-term preservation and continued access to digitized materials. If archival records in Africa were not properly kept and managed by African archivists, not only would the archival resources be lost for future generations, but it would also cause the institutions to face several risks associated with failure to produce evidence of their past.

Likewise, the above study was supported by the study of Khan and Aftab (2015), which revealed that the main reasons to digitize were to enhance access and improve preservation. By digitizing their collection, institutions could make information, that was previously made available only to a select group of users, accessible. Digitization could also help preserve materials making high-quality digital images available electronically, and it might reduce wear and tear on brittle and fragile documents.

Moreover, the above-stated studies also supported the findings of Balogun and Adjei (2018) in their study, "Challenges of Digitization of the National Archives of Nigeria." Respondents of the study admitted that digitization would be highly beneficial to the institution, but they had enumerated issues such as lack of funding, lack of digitization policy, and lack of trained personnel as the challenges facing the digitization project.

Similarly, this was also true to the study conducted by Kagoro, Khayundi, and Oyelana (2016). The findings of their study showed that inadequate training of the library staff, poor digitization policies, deterioration of digital media, copyright, shortage of cataloguers, poor network connectivity, which affected the work process, were some of the identified constraints.

The challenges stated were the same challenges that would be faced by any organization that would go into digitization. Organizations should also consider the financial aspects, training of the staff, and policy of preservation, in addition to those challenges,

Nevertheless, despite the challenges, it is safe to say that technology is the best way to use in preserving records, as shown by the findings of the study of Feigel (2015). In fact, technology had been proven to benefit human experience and achievement in many ways and had become a growing aspect of visitor engagement, documentation, and research in museums. Collection professionals in libraries and archives, as well as museums, were committed to

processing artifacts, in many cases, to make them digitally accessible online. Such collections of online assets are classified in digital libraries as online tools used for research and descriptive search engines to assist individuals beyond the need for physical interaction at the place of learning.

It is an acknowledged fact that this present era is an era of technology, and technology has to be used to the advantage of the majority since it is now one, if not the best, way of preservation. In as much as it is now the trend, and many are doing digitization, particularly in libraries, the standardization of theories and practices in archival management is recommended in order to have a better way of preserving archival materials through digitization. Libraries, however, should not be the only organizations that are involved in digitization, but all other government and non-government institutions/agencies, whose functions are to keep, store, and preserve records, as well.

Lauren's (2012) study revealed that collaboration and good public relations are essential in implementing digitization initiatives. Simplifying the application in creating processes to save time and financial resources, and resourceful staff committed for better service were the key elements. These elements played a vital part in the process of digitization and the development of digital libraries, especially in financially challenged libraries. Riding with the provision of free cloud applications and open source technologies enabled the Benguet State University (BSU) library to cope with the emerging trends in library services at a low and affordable cost.

The findings of the study of Vrana (2011) indicated a modest number of public libraries engaged in digitization projects. These results are attributable to unfavorable conditions for the initiation of digitization projects. Almost half of the public libraries planned to launch digitization projects as soon as necessary conditions for digitization become favorable. Digital content available in the surveyed public libraries already received positive feedback from users. Instead of mass digitization, public libraries chose the systematic digitization of selected library collections. To improve the quality of digitization of library materials, public libraries needed adequate financial support, additional training of library staff, and better infrastructure. The findings indicated that public libraries in Croatia are strongly dedicated to the development of digital collections as soon as they meet the necessary conditions for the launch of their digitization projects.

Information technology standards, according to Jiang (2009), have become the mainstream of standardization for the preservation of archives in developed countries such as Japan, America, *etc*. With these standards, policies should be made, according to Zach (2014). Analysis of the data suggested that the use of information sources and the role of embodied knowledge in digitization work depended on the relationship between the digitization of the media formats and the level of development of standards and policies for digitizing those formats. The research also suggested a variety of new avenues of inquiry for further conceptualizing digitization as information practice in archives and libraries, including the relationship between aesthetics and situated judgment in the creation of digitized library

materials, and the interplay between standards-following and improvisation supported by self-documentation.

Technology-based library services will become more sophisticated as the web becomes a public place throughout the world. As individuals actively enhance the library services, their main goal remains the same, to serve and teach users to find, evaluate, and use information effectively. The librarians should go on the road to prepare themselves to go with the new communication models, a change from face-to-face interaction to human-machine connection, from paper to digital delivery from text-centered mode to multi-media, and from physical presence to virtual presence.

The similarities among the studies mentioned are the fact that all studies have realized the importance of records management, information storage, retrieval, and preservation. Records play an essential role in any organization whether academic or business, these records speak for the organization; that is why it is necessary to preserve the information or records. As stated by Majumder (2015), information or records have always been a prime resource of an organization. Without it, no modern organization would be able to function. Businesses operate, as well as strategize, based on their records.

Another similarity is with the use of information technology; digitization is one, if not the best method to preserve records. With digitization, information or records would be accessed freely, would be retrieved speedily; and much more, it would save much time. Moreover, it becomes a realization among libraries and other organizations, in this case, universities, that information technology is an essential part of the change that happens in the world, which makes people's work lighter and speedier.

As Thurston (2016) stated, digitization is a priority issue for many governments and international organizations as a quick means of making records accessible and ending dependence on paper records. Most importantly, the profession will need to focus on becoming relevant to citizens' needs. If they fail to do so, there will be significant losses for government accountability, economic opportunity, citizens' rights, and the preservation of knowledge. The bottom line is that if people want to serve the world's citizens by protecting and preserving digital information, and if they want the funding situation to change, they must change.

The MSU-Main Campus, being a premier institution of higher learning in Mindanao, is no exception to this increasing number of records due to its great number of employees and students. It is along this line of thinking that this researcher, being a faculty of this institution, particularly in the Department of Library and Information Science of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, was motivated to conduct this study to elicit information from the selected faculty and staff of MSU-Main Campus on their records management practices and their willingness to digitize the records in the campus in order to better preserve them and to have an easier and speedier retrieval. This is deemed very timely, especially with so many unexpected and unavoidable circumstances _ acts of God calamities like floods, storms, earthquakes, *etc.* and acts of man calamities like fire, bombings, *etc.* _ that may be experienced by the Campus. With

records being digitized, there is less worry about the loss of records because they can still be retrieved.

Methodology

Purposive sampling was utilized in this study. The participants of the study were the selected faculty members and staff of the MSU-Main Campus. Slovin's formula was used in identifying the sample size with five (5) as the margin of error. There were 3,996 employees of the Campus, both faculty and staff, as provided by the Human Resource Development Office (HRDO). Using the Slovin's Formula, only 363 was considered as participants of the study to represent the total population. The participants were selected to elicit their ideas and observations about the records management practices of the records officers of the different offices and colleges in handling records. The instrument used is a modified version of the Checklists for Proper Records Management Practices taken from Good Records Management Practices of the Government Records Service (October 2011).

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Records Management of the Records Officers as Observed by the Participants

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description	Interpretation
1. The record officers use offsite storage, duplication, microfilming and digitization for vital records protection.	3.30	1.036	Undecided	Records are Moderately Managed
2. The record officers store inactive temporary and/or permanent records.	3.51	.905	Agree	Records are Managed
3. The Campus has a storage area for records.	3.74	.953	Agree	Records are Managed
4. The records officers develop and implement records classification scheme which covers all records irrespective of their nature or format.	3.57	.884	Agree	Records are Managed
5. The records officers' records classification scheme is able to support accurate capturing and easy retrieval of records.	3.54	.961	Agree	Records are Managed
6. The records officers' records classification scheme is able to provide robust security and access control of records.	3.47	.926	Undecided	Records are Moderately Managed
7. The records officers' records classification scheme facilitates segregation of vital records for protection.	3.53	.914	Agree	Records are Managed
8. The records officers review existing classification scheme regularly to cater to changing circumstances (e.g., obsolete subjects due to reorganization).	3.39	.975	Undecided	Records are Moderately Managed
9. Easy retrieval and well preservation of records, and space and time saving are the benefits that the records officers can get from digitization.	3.74	.900	Agree	Records are Managed

Table 1 continued…

10. Developing file plans, inventory of records, retiring inactive records and monitoring records are the duties of records management personnel.	3.92	.856	Agree	Records are Managed
11. Top management support, clear business vision and plan, adequate and on-going training and support, good project management, excellent strategies of change management, motivated great implementation team, and records officers' record-keeping awareness and practices are important for the successful implementation of records digitization.	3.96	.856	Agree	Records are Managed
12. Users resistance, financial constraints, lack of top management support, absence of skilled personnel, no appropriate equipment, and familiarity and comfort with paper are the reasons why the office could not implement digitization.	3.80	.940	Agree	Records are Managed
13. Records management, appraisal of records, managing electronic records, and preservation of records are the skills needed in records management.	3.96	.853	Agree	Records are Managed
14. The records officers are willing to digitize the records available.	3.90	.834	Agree	Records are Managed
15. Records digitization is the solution to records preservation.	4.06	.861	Agree	Records are Managed
Overall Mean	**3.69**	**.6227**	**Agree**	**Records are Managed**

Legend:	Scale	Range	Descriptive Rating	Qualitative Interpretation
	5	4.30 - 5.00	Strongly Agree	Records are Well-Managed
	4	3.50 - 4.20	Agree	Records are Managed
	3	2.70 - 3.40	Undecided	Records are Moderately Managed
	2	1.90 - 2.60	Disagree	Records are Poorly Managed
	1	1.00 - 1.80	Strongly Disagree	Records are Not Managed

The participants believed that "Records are Managed" in the MSU-Main Campus based on the interpretation shown in the table above. However, participants believed that the records officers need the necessary skills in records management as reflected in indicator 13, "Records management, appraisal of records, managing electronic records, and preservation of records are the skills needed in records management," with (M=3.96), the records officers also need to have skills in appraising as well as preserving printed and electronic records. The same mean with (M=3.96) is shown in indicator 11, "Top management support, clear business vision and plan, adequate and on-going training and support, good project management, excellent strategies of change management, motivated great implementation team, and records officers' record-keeping awareness and practices are important for the successful implementation of records digitization". If the administration would be supportive by providing the above-stated measures, a better

records management could be assured because participants, especially the records officers were very eager to improve their records management in the Campus. Skills that were mentioned in Indicator 13 can be acquired by the records officers if proper and adequate trainings are given to them. The administration has to be reminded about the importance of having these records stored in a secured place to be preserved and to be retrieved easily. As Pan (2010) stated that "records are not only necessary information resources but also valuable knowledge assets", which was supported by Majumder (2015) by stating that "information or records have always been a prime resource of an organization. Without them, no modern organization would be able to function." Thus, proper records management can only be achieved if the records officers handling records are well-equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills. As identified by Kagoro, Khayundi, and Oyelana (2016), inadequate training of the library staff is one of the constraints that can affect the work process, or records management, for that matter.

Another indicator with (M=3.92) is indicator 10, "Developing file plans, inventory of records, retiring inactive records and monitoring records are the duties of a records management personnel". If the records officers are equipped with knowledge and skills as mentioned above, they would be aware of their duties as records officers. As observed by the participants, some, if not majority of the records officers did not have file plans, and did not make a regular monitoring or inventory of their records. They just filed the records in their filing cabinets as they received them and no inventory was ever made. Some could not even classify active from inactive records because of lack of enough knowledge. In the event that the filing cabinets were already full, the records were placed anywhere like on top of the cabinets or they were laid on the floor. This supports indicator 13, that records officers need to have the skills in order to be aware and knowledgeable on how to manage their records _including, monitoring, inventory, identifying active from inactive records and lastly disposing of records.

Indicator 12, "Users resistance, financial constraints, lack of top management support, absence of skilled personnel, no appropriate equipment, and familiarity and comfort with paper are the reasons why the office could not implement digitization" (M=3.80) is another observation made by the participants. It is very true that financial and top administration support also affect records management. The finding of Kagoro, Khayundi, and Oyelana (2016) is similar to this finding that inadequate training of the library staff (or records officers in this paper) can affect the work process, or records management. So, the administration has to train the records officers in order to be equipped with the skills required especially that the records officers are willing to digitize the records available in the Campus, as shown in indicator 14 "The records officers are willing to digitize the records available" (M=3.90), and these records officers, as well as the participants believed that "Records digitization is the solution to records preservation," as can be gleaned in indicator 15 with (M=4.06). This can only be realized if budgetary support from the top administration is made available, and if the people assigned to handle the records have enough training and skills. This is also true to the findings of Balogun and Adjei (2018) in their study where respondents enumerated issues such as lack of funding, lack of digitization policy, and lack of trained personnel as the challenges facing the digitization project.

Indicator 15 has the highest mean which implies that participants are really into the idea of digitizing the records of the Main Campus. The following comments were given by the participants to support their willingness to go on the digitization of records (copied as written):

> "Sana mahigh-tech na tayo at may personnel na competitive na mag maman sa records. Dapat may archive din." (We hope that the Campus aspires for high-technology and there are personnel who are competitive in manning the records. There should also be an Archive here).

> "Uniform guidelines must be taught for the staff, and digitization is the right thing, great solution to preserve collections and records."

> "I.T. must be done monitoring records because one of the big job responsibilities in university is recording files *etc.*;"

> "If all records can be digitized, then it would be easy to retrieve and preserve records, and we can save space and time, which we all can benefit from;"

> "I agree that the document management system for Mindanao State University main campus must be in the database;"

> "I strongly agree with the university digitization of records as to getting records takes too much time to process due to its complicated procedures;" and

> "HRDO and Registrar Office Personnel should be toward digitization. They must learn to appreciate the significance of digitization."

As can be gleaned from these comments, participants viewed digitization as helpful and useful in organizing and preserving valuable records of the Campus; they thought that the constituents, as a whole could benefit from this. It has already been mentioned that one way of preserving information or records is through digitization because this would benefit the organization. Well-organized and well-preserved records would enhance the records' accessibility and preservation. Yang's (2009) study has revealed that with the development of information technology and the further improvement of archives management requirements, the archival digitization in the theory and practice has become one of the hot spots in recent years. Likewise, this finding of Yang's study was supported by Khan and Aftab's (2015) study, which revealed that the main reasons to digitize were to enhance access and improve preservation.

The administration has to give priorities to the following indicators as these are the indicators observed by the participants as "Records are Moderately Managed." These are Indicators 1, 6, and 8.

Indicator 1 "The records officers use offsite storage, duplication, microfilming and digitization for vital records protection" (M=3.30). As observed by the participants, prior and

during the conduct of this study, there was no offsite storage of records, microfilming and digitization of records. Some participants believed that in order for the records officers to practice microfilming and digitization, they would need training on how to do these, and equipment has to be supplied by the administration. Again, this supports indicator 12 on the top management support, and indicator 13 on the skills necessary for the records officers to properly manage records. Offsite storage is also not available as observed by the participants, for every office or college in the Campus stored their own records in their own way. Some participants believed that a central offsite storage of records could save more space for every office or college, and that could also help in the easy retrieval of records because participants have to go to one location if they needed records. This could also solve the problem of not having enough storage of records for some offices and colleges as mentioned in Indicator 10. Having an offsite storage in the Campus would give more space for incoming records.

Indicator 6, "The records officers' records classification scheme can provide robust security and access control of records" (M=3.47), is another indicator that needs to be given attention by the administration. If the Campus has a central storage of records, proper classification scheme can be implemented, and thus records will be safeguarded. What is practiced in the Campus is that every office or college has its own classification scheme. Participants believed that if the administration could design a uniform classification scheme for all offices and colleges, that would help in classifying the type of records and the type of access, because the records officers would have an idea what records are for public access and what records need permission in order to be accessed; in that way, records can be well-managed and well-secured.

Lastly, Indicator 8, "The records officers review existing classification scheme regularly to cater to changing circumstances (e.g., obsolete subject due to reorganization)" (M=3.39). Participants were again undecided on this indicator because the Campus does not practice uniform classification system for all offices and colleges. Every office has its classification system, and usually, these are arranged in alphabetical order.

Conclusions

Based on the data gathered, the following are concluded: although participants believed that "records are managed" in the Campus, there are some practices that need to be given attention by the administration. Records officers lack skills in handling records management thus need to attend seminars/workshops and trainings to widen their knowledge and be fully equipped with the necessary skills; top administration support is very important to have a good records management; and lastly, uniform classification scheme and digitization of records could help in safeguarding and easy retrieval of records.

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