

The Extent of Awareness, Knowledge, and Practices of Staff of a State University in Mindanao in Carrying out their Records Management

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ABSTRACT

To determine the extent of awareness, knowledge, and practices of the selected staff of a state university in Mindanao, this study was conducted. A survey questionnaire was utilized to gather information to the 363 participants using a purposive sampling procedure. The result shows that the participants were “aware and knowledgeable” of records management. However, they believed that the staff handling records should be sent to seminars and workshops to be fully oriented on how records should be handled. They further believed that an annual budget should be allocated to improve records management in the state university. The staff “moderately practiced” the preservation of records. They also believed that the university has a mission related to records management but should practice regular surveys and disposal of records. A uniform records classification scheme to be used for all offices in the university was recommended in order to track records easily and speedily.

Keywords: state university, records management, records awareness, records management practices

INTRODUCTION

It is an acknowledged fact that pieces of information or records have always been a prime resource of any organization. Without them, no organization would be able to function well or function at all. As emphasized by Yue (2011), the role of information in people's lives has been becoming more and more essential in order to cope with the fast developments of science and technology. It plays an important role in the progress of an enterprise to efficiently deal with the network business information. People and enterprises face the great challenge of the 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.

In as much as records are produced every day in an organization, it is a must for every organization to have an office assigned the task of managing and storing the records. The office may be named in different ways in different organizations, but it is generally known as a records management office in many organizations. Examples of organizations are business enterprises, government or non-government agencies, learning institutions, etc. In this paper, the organization refers to the supra-premier institution of higher learning in the Mindanao-Sulu-Palawan (MINSUPALA) region, the Mindanao State University.

Some organizations have designated centralized offices to manage all their records, while others leave their different offices to handle their respective records. How records are organized and preserved might be different from one office to another, but it cannot be denied that records kept, organized, and preserved in a central office are better-off than those scattered in different offices; thus, a centralized records management office is deemed to be more effective in carrying out the task of collecting, keeping, organizing, and preserving records.

FRAMEWORK

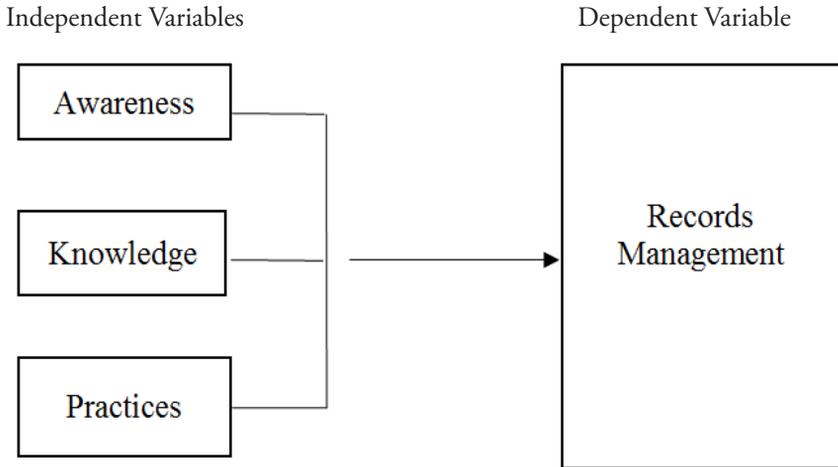


Figure 1. A Schematic Diagram Showing the Interplay of the Independent and Dependent Variables.

The diagram above shows the interplay of the Independent variables and the dependent variable. The study measured the extent of awareness, knowledge, and practices of the staff of the different colleges and offices of a state university in carrying out their jobs on records management.

As records are influential at all levels of human existence, the consequences of not addressing this perspective, particularly for the least empowered individuals in society, can be profound. Oliver (2016) believes in the power of records and record keeping in any organization. His study's primary purpose is to raise awareness of records and record-keeping in the information literacy community. The findings of his study showed that awareness of the power of records and record-keeping in people's lives is largely unaddressed and unacknowledged in information literacy research and practice.

The lack of awareness and knowledge of the importance of records and records management that include the use of technology lead to the non-readiness of some organizations to shift to a more orderly system of records management, thus the need for the document management system. This was revealed in the survey conducted by Brendan (2011) on the level of readiness of three universities in Nigeria towards managing their digital records by assessing the e-records

frameworks, infrastructures, and structural facilities that are available.

Another study that shows a lack of awareness of records management is Atulomah's (2011) study which concluded that with regards to awareness of record management practice, the respondents were not aware of any organized system of the records management program.

The common finding in the above studies shows a lack of awareness and knowledge, which leads to the notion that any organization should exert extra effort to make people in the organization aware and knowledgeable of whatever system is practiced because the success of any records management would only be achieved if people are aware and knowledgeable. Considering this notion, organizations need to implement records management programs and invest in electronic document and records management systems so that information can be accessed by the right person, at the right time, with the least amount of effort and cost.

As to the practice of records management, Thuston (2016) identified that there is a lack of practical capacity to manage and preserve digital records. Relatively few records professionals worldwide have had in-depth training and experience in managing and preserving digital records. University education programs are beginning to address the issues, but the lack of practical expertise nationally tends to mean that education and training remain theoretical.

In the case of Ozgur's study in 2009, he evaluated the new aspects of records management practices introduced by the start of the provision of public services in the electronic environment. The major finding of the study revealed that the development of the official communication flow with the opportunities of the electronic environment is a must of the modern state concept.

The above finding is supported by Cumming and Findlay's (2010) paper which aimed to assess examples of digital record-keeping practice in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) and determine whether the discipline is tipping into a period where digital record-keeping will change for the better, or whether it is tipping into digital oblivion. Findings showed that digital records and record-keeping are at a critical juncture across all business environments. The tremendous benefits that digital records and record keeping can realize are in danger of being offset by significant threats, complexities, and costs.

The stated studies showed that records management practice had been a problem to other organizations. It is high time this is given due attention because records are essential in any organization. If records are not properly managed, this might cause the organization to face a number of risks associated with failure

to produce evidence of their past, as stated by Brendan (2011), which was also supported by Borglund and Öberg (2008), when they stated that records are used as memories of the past.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted to find out how the staff is aware and knowledgeable to carry out their jobs in records management and to determine their records management practices.

METHODS

A survey was conducted on the selected 363 employees of a state university using a purposive sampling procedure. To determining the sample size with five (5) as the margin of error, the Slovin's formula was utilized. Thus, only 363 were considered participants of the study to represent the total population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The tables below show the data gathered in terms of the awareness and knowledge of the staff in carrying out their jobs in records management and their practices in terms of records preservation.

Table 1

Awareness and Knowledge of the Staff in Carrying Out their Jobs on Records Management

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description	Interpretation
1. The staff are aware of records management system and its importance.	4.11	.925	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
2. The staff have a good knowledge of recordkeeping concepts, principles and processes.	3.99	1.010	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
3. The University has an in-house vital records protection program.	3.48	1.015	Undecided	Moderately aware and knowledgeable
4. The staff have a good knowledge of what records are vital to the organization in enabling it to manage risks and meet its obligations.	3.83	.964	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable

Table 1 continued.

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description	Interpretation
5. The staff have a good knowledge of organizational records appraisal, disposal and approval processes and its retention and disposal authorities.	3.76	.969	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
6. The staff have a good knowledge of the organization's security and access procedures for records.	3.74	.951	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
7. A comprehensive records management program is in place to manage records in the University.	3.62	1.038	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
8. There is an individual in every office who is responsible for coordinating and overseeing the implementation of the records management program.	3.84	1.003	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
9. The staff are sent to seminars, trainings or workshops to be aware and knowledgeable on records management.	3.52	1.233	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
10. The records management policy defines clearly and adequately the program authority, objectives, responsibilities, and the interrelationships of the staff who manage or perform records management processes.	3.70	.949	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
11. The records management responsibilities are assigned to staff of appropriate level and skills.	3.81	.967	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
12. The procedures and guidelines have been established to underpin the records management policy for compliance by the staff.	3.66	.881	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
13. The records management policies, responsibilities, guidelines, and procedures have been properly documented.	3.71	.981	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
14. The records are well-preserved once they are already in the storage area.	3.66	1.007	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
15. The staff are aware and knowledgeable of records digitization.	3.60	1.012	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
16. The staff have a good knowledge of the organization's manual and automated records.	3.62	1.008	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
17. The staff have a good knowledge of the retrieval tools and finding aids for records in the organization.	3.60	.998	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
18. The University has an annual budget for records management program.	3.47	1.017	Undecided	Moderately aware and knowledgeable
Overall Mean	3.70	.7734	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable

Legend:

Scale	Range	Descriptive Rating	Qualitative Interpretation
5	4.50 - 5.00	Strongly Agree	Highly aware and knowledgeable
4	3.50 - 4.49	Agree	Aware and knowledgeable
3	2.50 - 3.49	Undecided	Moderately aware and knowledgeable
2	1.50 - 2.49	Disagree	Less aware and knowledgeable
1	1.00 - 1.49	Strongly Disagree	Not aware and knowledgeable

Based on the data shown in the above table, the participants were aware and knowledgeable of records management in carrying out their jobs. The indicator with the highest mean of 4.11 is Indicator 1; The staff is aware of the records management system and its importance. Participants believed that the staff assigned in records management have enough awareness and knowledge as to what records are to be kept and or preserved and how vital these records are. Furthermore, they believed that the University has to safeguard these records as they document the existence of the University. This finding is supported by the statement of Reed (2005), as cited by Borglund and Öberg (2008), that the second purpose of records is to be used as a memory of the past, i.e., as evidence of the transaction that resulted in the record. Similarly, Pan (2010) averred that records are not only important information resources but also valuable knowledge assets.

Heads of offices/Deans of colleges of the University also see the importance and need of records management because they assign staff or individuals to man the records in their respective offices/colleges. However, every office/college has a different way of organizing the records based on what they believe to be the best way to preserve and retrieve them. Some of the participants, by the way, suggested that there should be a uniform system in organizing, keeping, and preserving the records, and to make this possible, seminars/workshops or training for this purpose should be conducted among the staff handling the records.

In Indicator 9, “The staff are sent to seminars, training or workshops to be aware and knowledgeable on records management,” participants answered they were “aware and knowledgeable,” as shown in the table above with a mean of 3.52. However, based on some informal interviews with the participants while the researcher was administering the questionnaires and based further on some comments written on the questionnaires, this indicator had the most comments or suggestions gathered, such as (copied as written):

1. “The university should let the staff go on conferences and seminars so that they will become updated to modern technologies and procedures in filing and managing records, especially the computerization of every record of patients in the unit. It is hoped that this study could help modernize the Records Section and that an Archive could be established.”

This was a comment from one of the staff of the University Medical Services and Hospital. Other comments were (copied as written):

2. “Training and development for office management are needed.”

3. “I hope that every year, the staff are sent to seminars or training to be aware

and knowledgeable on records management.”

4. “There should be training for the staff so that they would know their specific functions, especially in terms of office works/record keeping.”

5. “The management staff should undergo specific seminars to upgrade the management system.”

6. “Staff needs seminar from outside university and more implementations; and lastly there should be a proper training for records/document management for all staff in every college and office in the University because based on my observation records management seems to be not a priority of the University Administration.”

It can be gleaned from the above-stated comments that participants, especially the staff, are very much eager to learn and broaden their awareness and knowledge on records management since they know how important this information or records are, as well as their preservation for future use. True indeed is Yue’s (2011) statement that the role of information in people’s lives has been becoming more and more essential to cope with the fast developments of science and technology. Participants also believed that those knowledgeable in records management should be assigned to do the task, and they should be aware of their duties and responsibilities. Moreover, they also hope that the staff who man the records should be held liable and accountable for these records. This finding aligns with Phiri and Tough’s (2018) study that good records management can contribute to effective corporate governance and accountability. Likewise, Murphy (2018) recommended in his study that management should embrace the records management function to ensure its effectiveness, and also, professionally trained records managers should be employed.

Also, participants believed that seminars were needed because of the influence of technology in every work in the organization, “especially now that people pay more and more attention to information storage and retrieval,” as Yue (2011) emphasized. They (participants) also believed that they have to take advantage of technology, for this can help them in making a better way of keeping and retrieving the records.

The above finding implies that the conduct of seminars and training related to records management is very important because this will help the staff responsible for records management be more aware, knowledgeable, and updated with the latest trends. As stressed out in the study of Kagoro, Khayundi, and Oyelana (2016), “inadequate training of the library staff, (or in this study the staff who

man the records) is one of the identified constraints that will affect work process.”

Of the 18 indicators, only Indicators 3 and 18, did the participants answer “undecided” or “moderately aware and knowledgeable.” These were “the University has a vital in-house records protection program” with a mean of 3.48, and “the University has an annual budget for records management program” with a mean of 3.4, respectively. Participants were undecided on these two indicators because they were unsure whether the University has a vital protection program and annual budget for the records management program. It implies that the programs were not visible or known to the participants, so they were undecided. If the University has these programs, the office responsible for these programs lacks information dissemination. Based on observations and some informal interviews, participants believed that there were no such programs and that they had not heard of an annual budget for the said purpose. One of the participants suggested that the administration give a sufficient budget for the Records Section of every office so that all the files would be secured and arranged properly, or allocate adequate funding to upgrade the preservation of important records/documents of the University.

Table 2

Practices of the Staff in Terms of Preservation of Records

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description	Interpretation
1. The staff practice records management.	3.75	.877	Agree	Practiced
2. The University has a mission statement related to records management.	3.62	.898	Agree	Practiced
3. The University has a records management manual that explains the handling of records, filing procedures, creating new files, recording the existence of a new file, controlling of file movement, introduction of closing files, filing storage methods, security of records, and house-keeping procedures.	3.57	.956	Agree	Practiced
4. The University conducts records survey.	3.29	1.052	Undecided	Moderately Practiced

Table 2 continued.

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description	Interpretation
5. The University disposes records regularly.	3.12	.925	Undecided	Moderately Practiced
6. Burning, shredding, and transferring of records to the stockroom are practiced by the staff in disposing records.	3.06	.941	Undecided	Moderately Practiced
7. The University’s records classification scheme facilitates establishment of records retention and disposal schedules and segregation of records with different retention periods to support timely and effective disposal.	3.35	.875	Undecided	Moderately Practiced
8. There is a documentation to explain the organization of records classification scheme, titling and coding mechanisms of files.	3.38	.951	Undecided	Moderately Practiced
Overall Mean	3.39	.7407	Undecided	Moderately Practiced

Legend:

Scale	Range	Descriptive Rating	Qualitative Interpretation
5	4.50 - 5.00	Strongly Agree	Highly Practiced
4	3.50 - 4.49	Agree	Practiced
3	2.50 - 3.49	Undecided	Moderately Practiced
2	1.50 - 2.49	Disagree	Less Practiced
1	1.00 - 1.49	Strongly Disagree	Not Practiced

Based on the data shown in Table 2, in terms of practices of the staff on the preservation of records, the respondents were “undecided” or believed that the staff “moderately practiced” preservation of records.

The following were the indicators which the respondents believed to be practiced by the staff assigned in records management: Indicator 1, the staff practice records management (M=3.75); Indicator 2, the University has a mission statement related to records management (M=3.62); and Indicator 3, the University has a records management manual that explains the handling of records, filing procedures, creating new files, recording the existence of a new file, controlling of file movement, the introduction of closing files, filing storage methods, security of records, and house-keeping procedures (M=3.57”).

Indicator 1, the staff practice records management, was supported by the response of the participants, which was shown in Table 1 that the respondents were aware and knowledgeable of records management. Thus, they believed

that the staff practice records management, though they observed that it was not systematic because every office/college has its records management system. They did not also know if they were doing it the right way because there were no training or seminars that they have attended to know how to do records management systematically. Much more, they did not even have an orientation on how to do it; some new employees assigned to do the task were just following or continuing what had been practiced by their predecessor in the past.

In Indicator 2, the University has a stated mission related to records management. Some participants believed that there should have been a mission, but as to familiarity with this, they were not sure. Some said maybe it is available at the HRDO as it is the office responsible for most of the records, while others said there was none.

As to the last indicator, Indicator 3, the University has a records management manual that explains the handling of records, filing procedures, creating new files, recording the existence of a new file, controlling of file movement, the introduction of closing files, filing storage methods, security of records, and house-keeping procedures, some of the participants believed that there is a manual available that explains the procedures on how these records are handled. There might be an available manual, as some could explain how the records should be managed. However, none of the participants could show a copy of the manual, especially those who were new in the office/college, for they said they had not seen a manual related to the preservation of records.

Though the participants believed that the staff practice records management and they were aware that the University has a mission related to records management, they still believed that the following indicators were “moderately practiced,” namely, Indicator 4, the University conducts records survey ($M=3.29$); Indicator 5, the University disposes of records regularly ($M=3.12$); Indicator 6, burning, shredding, and transferring of records to the stockroom are practiced by the staff in disposing of records ($M=3.06$); Indicator 7, the University’s records classification scheme facilitates the establishment of records retention and disposal schedules and segregation of records with different retention periods to support timely and effective disposal ($M=3.35$). Indicator 8, there is a documentation to explain the organization of records classification scheme, titling and coding mechanisms of files ($M=3.38$).

Some of these practices were never experienced at the University. Based on the informal interviews with some employees, some commented that there might be some offices/colleges which may be practicing some of the above-stated indicators,

but this is not true to all offices/colleges. Participants were not sure because these practices were not observed nor experienced by them. One of the participants said that in some colleges, they usually conduct a survey of records, especially during accreditation, because they were required to check on the availability of records, but this activity was not done regularly. The University also does not have a central stockroom to stock all records may it be permanent or temporary that is why participants were undecided on this matter. One participant left a comment in his/her questionnaire that said:

1. “The University is very poor in stocking the records and also compiling.”

Due to the lack of stockroom, some records, especially those which could no longer fit inside the cabinets, were piled on the floors. This finding is not only true to the University as it is a common problem in other institutions, too.

The University has to revisit its mission to address this problem, i.e., its capacity in handling and preserving records as Thuston (2016) had identified in his study that there is a lack of practical capacity to manage and preserve digital records, relatively few records professionals worldwide have in-depth training and experience in managing and preserving digital records. University education programs are beginning to address the issues, but the lack of practical expertise nationally tends to mean that education and training remain theoretical. Newly qualified professionals flounder when faced with the enormous challenges of turning theoretical learning into practical solutions.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data gathered, it is concluded that the records management in the University is not well-practiced. Although respondents believed that records were managed, some of their practices and perceptions show that it is not well-practiced. There is no uniform classification used for all offices, making it difficult to track records, and there is no central stock room to store all important documents. Moreover, there is no regular disposal of records; hence, the staff handling the records were having a hard time appraising what records to dispose of; they cannot even classify active from inactive records because they do not have enough knowledge to do so. The staff handling records need to attend seminars/workshops and training to widen their knowledge in handling records. Lastly, the administration’s support, by providing a sufficient budget, is very much needed to manage the records on the University properly.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincerest acknowledgments are due to the Mindanao State University Main Campus administration for granting her scholarship; the MSU Faculty and Staff for being so cooperative and accommodating in accomplishing the questionnaires; and Dr. Nenita I. Prado, her adviser, for guiding her throughout the conduct of the study.