Record Keeping in the Human Resources Department of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology: Implications for Service Delivery

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Abstract
This study examined the record keeping infrastructure of the Human Resource Department (HRD) of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (K.N.U.ST). Its primary objective was to establish the extent to which records within the Department are managed as a defining resource in order to promote service delivery. Like most modern organisations, the HRD must have strategies to ensure that full and accurate evidence of its decisions, actions and transactions are recorded, captured and maintained by record keeping systems. In examining the infrastructure and programme structure, the study also looked at the strategies that determined how, when, where and in what form information is captured in records as evidence and for how long it is required. The record keeping infrastructure of the HRD was examined in five key areas, namely; policies and regulatory framework, standards and practices for record care, storage facilities and preservation management, resources and the role of record keeping on the HRD service delivery.The case study method was employed and semi-structured interview and observation used as data collection instruments. The findings of the study revealed that the record keeping practices in the HRD are not adequately supported by a record keeping infrastructure which is made up of a policy and regulatory framework, a programme structure, resources and people. Furthermore, there was not in place a monitoring system to ensure sound record keeping standards and practices.
Keywords: Record Keeping, Human Resource Department, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Implications, Service Delivery

1.0 Introduction
The term 'Human Resource Management' (HRM) has been subjected to considerable debate overtime. The concept is shrouded in managerial hype and its underlying philosophy and character is highly controversial because it lacks precise formulation and agreement as to its significance. Nonetheless, definition of the subject matter is given according to Bratton and Gold (1999) as "that part of the management process that specialises in the management of people in work organisations. HRM emphasises that employees are critical to achieving sustainable competitive advantage, that human resources practices need to be integrated with the corporate strategy, and that human resource specialists help organisational controllers to meet both efficiency and equity objectives."

IRMT (2009) affirms that "any organization's development and sustainability will depend on sound and effective human resource management, and approaches it chooses to follow will be derived in part from an analysis of the information contained in personnel records".

For an organisation to manage its human resource effectively there must be in place HRM policies and practices which plays an important part in the way services are delivered in the organisation. According to Scheinder et al (1993), HRM policies and practices are not only vital for a service climate but should be designed to match the type of service to be delivered. In the results that emerged from the studies of frontline employees in a bank, it was argued that HRM policies were crucial for creating a positive service climate (Schneider et al, 1985). It is also believed that the HR practices that are used to implement an organisation's business strategy impact on both the psychological contracts it has with its employees (Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni1994).

Human Resources policies are systems established by an organization to support administrative personnel functions, performance management, employee relations and planning (Armstrong, 2006). The policies define an organization values or beliefs about how people should be treated. Human resource policy like training and development, reward and recruitment are likely to impact on the way staff manages records in organizations. To this extend any policy affecting them are likely to impact on how effectively services are delivered, of which records management is key.

There cannot be proper record keeping in any organisation without an effective records management infrastructure. This provides the mandate, direction, responsibility, tools and capacity to create, use and preserve records. Benefits of an effective infrastructure include:

1. More efficient and effective policies, programmes and services
2. Better decisions
3. Better protection of personnel policy and confidentiality
4. Higher levels of trust and accountability
5. More successful deployment of Information Technology (I T).
6. Reduced programme, legal, financial and operational risks.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Egwunyenga (2009) asserts that, record keeping problems are pronounced in the university system because accurate, reliable and trustworthy records that fulfill evidential requirements are being created but not properly managed. A preliminary investigation by the researcher showed that record keeping practices in the HRD are not guided by any policies, rules and procedures. The lack of clear roles for staff in the HRD as far as record keeping is concerned, implies that records are not being properly managed from their creation, which is a key stage in relation to the life cycle management of records (Shepherd and Yeo,2003).

The HRD, just like any other department in an organisation, is a record creating unit which has a need for accurate and complete records. For example, performance-related human resource management, designed to reward the most competent staff and penalise poor performers, is dependent upon information about the present and past performance of individuals. This scheme will fail where the relevant records cannot be located. Similarly, all approaches to improve payroll control rely upon more efficient use of information. The personnel file is the primary source of evidence that a person actually works for the University, that the grade is appropriate to the salary paid and that any additional benefits are appropriate and have been authorised. In the absence of human resource records, complete and authentic entries on the payroll database cannot be checked against an authoritative source.
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1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the policies and regulatory framework that provide mandate for records care.
2. To examine the standards and practices for record keeping through the life cycle.
3. To examine the storage facilities and preservation management practices.
4. To examine the resources availability including professionally trained staff and technological based tools for record care.
5. To examine the role of record keeping in the HRD service delivery

1.3 Research Questions

1. Are there policies and regulatory framework that provide mandate for records care?
2. Are there suitable standards and practices for records management activities?
3. What is the state of storage facilities and quality of preservation management practices?
4. Are there resources including professionally trained staff and technological based tools for record care?
5. What role, if any, does records management play in support of HRD service delivery?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Human Resource Management

Griffin and Hoyle (2009) affirm that "any organization's development and sustainability will depend on sound and effective human resource management, and approaches it chooses to follow will be derived in part from an analysis of the information contained in personnel records". Beer (1997) argued that the HR function needs to shed its traditional administrative role and adopt a new strategic role, aimed at developing the organization and the capabilities of its managers.

Anderson (1994), asserts that human resource management ' seeks to bring together and develop into an effective organization the men and women who makes up enterprise, enabling each to make his own best contribution its success both as an individual and as a member of a working group'. He further argues that it does not only ensure that the business of an organization succeeds but it also provides fair terms and conditions of employment and satisfying work for those employed.

Kane and Crawford (1999) have identified factors, which act as barriers to effective HRM. These barriers include the following:

- Top management have a low priority, and often a short-term view, of what the real issues in HRM and the profession are according to various researchers
- HRM practitioners are perceived to lack sufficient knowledge and skills necessary to implement effective HRM practices at various levels in their organisations
- HR professionals have not been assertive enough to be present in the boardroom to guide HR programmes to achieve long-term impacts on such HR initiatives. This probably also points to a lack of

adequate drive and communication to apply strategic human resources management (SHRM) fully.

If an organization is to achieve its goals, it must not only have the required resources, it must also use them effectively. The resources available to a manager are human, financial, physical, and informational. While human resources (HR) have always been critical to the success of any organization, they have assumed an increasingly greater importance that is being recognized inside and outside work organizations.

HRD typically include individuals with a wide variety and range of knowledge, skills, and abilities who are expected to perform job activities in a manner that contributes to the attainment of organizational goals. How effectively employees contribute to the organization depends in large part upon the quality of the HR program (including staffing, training, and compensation) as well as the ability and willingness of management to create an environment that fosters the effective use of human resources.

2.2 Records and Human Resource Management

Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) state that organizations that manage their records well will reap immediate benefits in terms of being able to utilize all available information resources for competitive advantage. Records play a very important role in human resource management from selection to exit of a staff.

Performance-related human resource management, designed to reward the most competent staff and penalise poor performers, is dependent upon information about the present and past performance of individuals. This scheme will fail where the relevant records cannot be located. Similarly, all approaches to improved payroll control rely upon more efficient use of information. The personnel file should be the primary source of evidence that a person actually works for an organisation, that the grade is appropriate to the salary paid and that any additional benefits are appropriate and have been authorised. In the absence of human resource records, complete and authentic entries on the payroll database cannot be checked against an authoritative source. Head counts and questionnaires do no more than provide a temporary solution and payroll control often collapse because of the absence of reliable data.

Among the functions perform by a human resource unite of an organization are selection, recruitment, retention and exit of its staff. None of these activities can be undertaken effectively without reliable records and good record keeping system. After selecting and recruiting personnel into an organization there is the need for an evaluation of workers at least once a year, periodically staff who are due for promotion must also be promoted from one level to another based on their performance. To motivate staff to put up their best, outstanding staff may be given incentive such as cash, sponsorship for full time study, bonuses and prizes. Staffs who have reached their retirement will retire and their retirement benefit paid to them. All these can be achieved if there is an efficient record keeping system. Without doubt there is the need for every organization to know what is happening to its human resource function and the capacity of the record keeping system to support its evidence-base.

3.0 Methodology

The main purpose of the study was to examine the record keeping infrastructure of the Human Resource Department (HRD) of KNUST. A qualitative paradigm largely guided the study with the Case study approach used as the research design. Interviews and observations were use to elicit information from the respondents. A total of 15 people participated in the study.

Table1. Breakdown of study population

Categories of staff	Target population	Sample Population
Senior members	5	5
Senior staff	6	6
Junior staff	4	4
Total	15	15

The single stage sampling technique was employed to maximize the total number of respondents within the sampling frame to achieve a closer representation of the real issues under investigation. The data obtained was analysed around thematic themes related to the objectives of the study.

4.0 Findings and Discussions

Records of various kinds are created in every institution in accordance with their function, activities and transactions. There cannot be proper record keeping in any organisation without an effective records management infrastructure. This provides the mandate, direction, responsibility, tools and capacity to create, use and preserve records.

In outlining the findings of the study, it is important to emphasis that records management theory and practice underline the need to develop a records and information framework that complies with international records management standards. In particular, the ISO 15489 – 2001, is a useful guide.

The findings and discussion are presented under the themes below:

- Policy and regulatory framework
- Standards and practices for records care
- Records appraisal, retention and disposition
- Records storage and preservation
- Personnel training and development

4.1 Policies and Regulatory Framework

According to Williams (2006), a policy is a set of coherent decisions with a common long-term aim(s) that relate to a specific organizational purpose. In short, policies inform users on what is expected of them and through policies staff members are given guidance regarding the boundaries of their service (Dunlop 2009).

All organisations should have a formally agreed policy for the management of their records. The goal of the policy should be the creation and management of authentic, reliable and useable records capable of supporting business functions and activities for as long as they are required. The policy should be adopted and endorsed at the highest decision making level and promulgated throughout the organisation (ISO 15489: 2001, clause 6.2). This policy becomes the official charter for all record keeping activities.

The responses from all the staff, (100%) of the HRD at KNUST showed that record keeping practices are not guided by any policies, rules and procedures. The lack of clear roles for staff, and the human resource units as highlighted by the research findings, implies that records are not being properly managed from their creation to disposition, which is a key relation to the life cycle management of records (Shepherd and Yeo: 2003). In the absence of such a policy, the university lacked the mandate and direction for the creation, use and preservation of records.

4.2 Standards and Practices for Records Care

Record keeping processes involve the creation, use and preservation of records. This study tried to find out the existence of laid down standards and practices for the management of records over their complete life cycle and in their many media and formats.

Findings indicated that the HRD dealt with two main types of records. These were personnel records and administrative records. The administrative records are operational files relating specifically to the creation of policies and procedures. At the HRD, policy files contain policy material emanating from boards and committees covering areas such as housing, disciplinary matters, planning and issues related to the affiliation of private institutions. Personnel records on the other hand are case files of individual members of staff. They are first opened when an individual is appointed as a member of staff of the university. The records they contain include appointment letter, acceptance and date of assumption of duty and transfers. Other documents on the personnel file are disciplinary issues, salary adjustment, promotions, social security and other benefits.

4.3 Retention and disposition of records

The study sought to find out if there exists within the Department a structured records disposition schedule. A Records disposal refers to the actions that are associated with implementing decisions about the retention or destruction of records. These may also include migration and transfer of records to new storage location, custodians or owners (ISO 15489:2001, AS 4390.1:1996). Disposal programme promotes easy retrieval of records, helps to avoid their inadvent destruction, and helps to eliminate costs associated with the storage and maintenance of unwanted records (shepherd:2003).

The study revealed that the HRD has no retention and disposal schedule. The retention period for records is determined by their nature and value for the organisation. With the exception of records of historical value which must be permanently kept, the destruction of other records should be authorised and controlled in order to preserve the confidentiality of such records. The study further revealed that due to the lack of disposal programme, voluminous employee records are still kept in the various offices of the Department as well as in the registry.

4.4 Records storage and preservation

Storage facilities should protect records from unauthorised access, theft, damage, loss, destruction, and natural disaster (South Africa, 2003). There is the need for an organization to consider which system will serve it better if proper storage requirement is to be met. Whatever system is to be considered, the basic requirement should include achieving economy and efficiency in storage and retrieval. It will also provide a mechanism for the regular selection of records leading to destruction and permanent archival retention. Furthermore, it must secure records against unauthorised access, and thereby help to develop controlled environment condition to safeguard records from deterioration.

The study revealed that current records are kept in cabinets in offices whiles semi-current records are kept in a designated section in the main registry manned by two Junior Administrative Assistants of the HRD.

The semi-current records are held in file cabinets (metal), while others were kept on open shelves.

The researcher also tried to find out the existence of archives for housing permanent records. All the respondents representing 100% indicated the existence of such a facility. On close examination, it was revealed that what is considered an archive is nothing more than a dumping ground. The place is moldy, insects and pest infested; the roof is leaking and the building which should be housing records of the entire University is an apology of an archive.

4.5 Personnel training and development

An important resource of every organisation is the personnel whose job is to help achieve business objectives. Respondents were asked about their professional knowledge and skills in record keeping.

The findings of the study showed that those responsible for the maintenance of records in the Department seemed to lack the necessary skills and knowledge to do so effectively. Yet, staff of any organization responsible for the care of records should have the relevant competencies. Well-trained records management staff would be able to facilitate and support the implementation of sound records management practices throughout the Department (Barata et al, 2001).

The study further revealed that there was only one Senior Member of the Department who had qualification in Management Information System (MIS). Periodically, the HRD organizes in-service training in record keeping for all the staff, but such a facility is not regular to impact any significant changes in the culture of maintaining records in the department.

In the absence of the Department defining categories of training needs, identifying priorities and planning programmes, records personnel have little understanding of their record keeping roles, functions and related competencies. Records and information management training is the only means of strengthening awareness of employees of the University of their responsibilities for the stewardship of information and provide improved ability to develop, manage and use information and knowledge resources to support effective service delivery.

4.6 Effective Technology-Base Tools to Support Records Management Activities

The aim of this section was to examine the role of information technology on record keeping in the HRD. The result of the study indicated that the University has recently introduced Information Management System in the Department under the supervision of the Senior Member who has a qualification in Management Information System (MIS), with the view to digitize the HRD records. This project is however is in the embryonic stage.

The study further sought to find out if there was a policy in place to support this initiative. The result is that there was no policy to that effect. Nevertheless, in order to achieve a successful electronic records management programme, an organization needs to establish a sustainable records management infrastructure. This infrastructure provides institutions and individuals with the mandate, direction, responsibility, tools and capacity to create, use and preserve information effectively (IRMT, 2009). Where the records infrastructure is strong, record keeping functions are embedded in the institution's policy, in fundamental business processes, in technology systems and applications, in departmental management priorities and in the work habits of all employees.

4.7 The Role of Record Keeping on the HRD Service Delivery

The researcher wanted to establish the role of record keeping on the HRD service delivery. Records are essential at operational, tactical and strategic levels for the conduct of organisational activities (Ngoepe, 2003). Records, for example, form the basis upon which strategic plans, management plans and the budget of organisations are compiled. They are kept to support decisions and actions that are taken by an organisation, and to provide evidence of what an organisation has achieved, as well as of its dealings with its customers and other organisations (Kemoni et al, 2007). Records are the basis of accountability and also enable transparency.

All the respondents representing 100% indicated that record keeping plays an important role in the way that services are delivered in the Department. They were of the view that without proper record keeping they will not be able to render services effectively. They further indicated that their duties are sometimes hampered due to the fact that they could not locate the records that they want to work on, and as a result, certain decisions have to be delayed. The study also revealed that due to the in ability of the HRD to effectively secure its records there are instances of the misuse of records, such as unauthorised access to or alteration of records.

5.0 Recommendations

The study has shown that record keeping practices in the HRD is weak and does not support effective service delivery. This is a depressing picture of the capacity of the Department. The following recommendations are made for the improvement of human resource record keeping practices.

5.1 Policies and Regulatory Framework

A record keeping policy is the basis of all record keeping authority. It provides the framework within which functions are performed and contributes to the success of the organization as a whole. The University needs to formulate a comprehensive and up-to-date policy. The policy should encompass elements such as the precise definition of records covering all media and formats, assign primary responsibility for managing records throughout their life cycle and the roles of all key officers and records staff defined. A records office procedural manual, disposal schedules and guidance materials should also be developed under the authority of the policy.

5.2 Storage facilities and preservation management

The provision of a conducive environment and storage facilities for records is a prerequisite in record keeping practices. Rhys-Lewis (2000) noted that the starting point in developing a strategy to maintain material that is affected by its surroundings is to ensure that the building in which it is housed meets the basic requirements for the storage of library and archive materials. The need for the Department to pay attention to preservation management considerations is imperative.

Good housekeeping (cleaning) practices are essential. With regard to records storage, steel is preferred because it is non-combustible compared to wood which is combustible and a food source for insects. It is also necessary that records repositories have the capacity to respond to unforeseen eventualities like disasters.

5.3 Staff training and development

The findings of the study showed that those responsible for the maintenance of records lack the necessary skills and knowledge to do so effectively. Well trained records staff will facilitate and support the implementation of sound record keeping practices throughout the HRD. Training should be continuously offered to the records staff to inculcate new skills and competencies. A regular training programme informed by record audit reports must be prepared each year. The challenges that are faced by records staff should be identified, so that they can be overcome in implementing record keeping practices compliant with the record keeping policy and regulatory framework. Record management training could also be extended to all categories of staff in the HRD.

5.4 Effective Technology-Base Tools to Support Records Management Activities

Findings showed that paper-based employee records are incomplete, providing limited coverage of all human resource transactions in the HRD. The Department should develop and implement an electronic record keeping system that will manage documents and record flows in the HRD. Although the University has recently introduced a programme with a view of digitising the human resource records, this project is however, in the embryonic stage. The electronic system if carefully planned, will promote efficiency and effectiveness in record keeping. Instead of relying on physically conveying records from one location to the other, the delivery of documents to relevant units could be done electronically. Before implementing the system, an analysis should be conducted in order to establish the electronic readiness of the HRD for such a system.

5.5 Role of Record Keeping on the HRD Service Delivery

Poor record keeping can impact negatively on the HRD service delivery as revealed by the study. An awareness campaign should be held for all categories of staff in order to promote and to highlight the benefits of good record keeping, including the necessity for keeping records as evidence. The relationship between records and effective service delivery should be made known. All members of staff should be made aware of the role that they need to play in ensuring that records created are effectively and efficiently managed as a defining resource.

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