Personnel Records Management: A Case of Liwale District Council in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating the personnel records and the challenges faced in the management of these records in Liwale District Council (LDC) in Tanzania. The study used a qualitative approach in which 30 respondents were purposely selected. Questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to collect data in this study. Quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science version 20 computer program while qualitative data were subjected to content analysis. Findings revealed that appointment letters and letters of confirmation were the most cited type of personnel records readily available in various departments in the District. Others include health and social security records, letters of transfer, notifications of termination/death and retirement, medical report, wages and salary slips, and copies of birth certificates. In addition, inadequate and improper storage facilities, absence of electronic records management system, inadequate space for records storage, human resource officers lack of records management skills and lack of internal training were the main challenges affecting the management of personnel records in the District. It is recommended that Liwale District Council should address the challenges faced in the management of personnel records for better and fair decision-making.

Keywords: *Records Management, Personnel Records Management, Tanzania*

1. INTRODUCTION

All organizations regardless of their function produce records that document and provide impartial evidence of activities performed, events that occurred, results achieved, or statements made (Sanwine, 2020). Through records management, all records and other documents are controlled in their lifecycle from creation, receipt, maintenance, circulation, organization, storage and retrieval until their ultimate disposal.

Since organizations are operated by people, it then becomes clear that personnel records of every employee working in an organization need to be created and well preserved for current and future references. According to Abias et al. (2021), organizations generate several records which include financial records, legal records, administrative records, research records and personnel records, which is the focus of this study.

According to Keakopa et al (2009), personnel records are all recorded information with an effect on human resources in the organization and are kept in a systematic

order for easy access and retrieval when needed. Furthermore, Kautto and Henttonen (2020) reported that personnel and other types of records are strategic devices used by the government and its organs to communicate with citizens and in promoting trust between the government and its people.

The United Republic of Tanzania introduced the records and archives management Act No. 3 of 2002 which among other things outlines the responsibility of the head of public office in the creation and maintenance of adequate records of transactions and events of their respective public offices through the establishment of proper and effective records management practices. According to Aylwin and Policzer (2020), effective records management enhances opportunities for better information use or re-use, identification of legal risks and good practices of employees in an organization. Effective records management allows the organization to render better services to customers, provides legal defensibility and leads to improved organizational productivity.

Sensitivity to personnel records and their significant contributions to an organization in the service need to be well received, created, processed, carefully circulated when the need arises, and properly preserved to avoid leakage to unauthorized personnel. Despite the sensitivity of personnel records there is no empirical evidence on how personnel records are properly managed to avoid their leakage to unauthorized people. There is lack of information about the management of personnel records in many institutions and this study was conducted to confirm this observation made during a pilot study of 2019 using Liwale District Council in Lindi region, Tanzania as a case to represent other districts.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Liwale District Council in Lindi Region, Tanzania. The council was purposely chosen following a baseline survey conducted in 2019. During the survey it was noticed that there were a lot of leakages of personal information and poor handling practices of personnel records in various departments and these motivated the researchers to conduct this study. This study targeted Human Resources Officers, Records Management Officers and office assistants whose key duties include dealing with organizational records namely, sorting, classifying, organizing, and recording them ready for transferring them to the right action officers.

The study purposively selected 14 Human Resource Officers, 8 Records Management Officers and 8 office attendants working in Liwale District Council. Purposive sampling was adopted because it was easier and speedy (Sanwine, 2020). . In-depth interviews were administered to Human Resource Officers to get in-depth information concerning the management of personnel records at LDC.

Questionnaires were also administered to Records Management Officers and office assistants while maintaining anonymity to enable them to express sensitive issues freely. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for this study. Qualitative data were subjected to content analysis after categorizing them by themes while quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 computer program.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were gender, age and education level as shown in Table 1. The results revealed that the majority of respondents were female implying that females constitute a major workforce in the management of personnel records in Liwale District Council as compared to their male counterparts.

This is contrary to the study findings by Tough and Popoola, (2009) who reported that males comprise a large workforce in records management offices in Nigerian private universities. The findings of this study agree with the findings in a study by Popoola and Oluwole (2007) who reported that there were more female than male staff in the registries working as Records Officers in the Osun State Civil Service, Nigeria. Furthermore, the findings, in Table 1 show that the majority of the respondents were aged between 30-49 years, which implies that the respondents are young and have many years to serve as public servants since the compulsory retirement age is 60 years in Tanzania.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

| Variable (n =30)		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	10	33.3
	Female	20	66.7
Age	18-29	6	20
	30-49	19	63.3
	50-59	5	16.7
Education level	Secondary school	4	13.3
	Certificate	6	20
	Diploma	14	46.7
	Bachelor	6	20

The study by Popoola and Oluwole (2007) also noted that employers with the age range from 22 to 45 are active workers that still have many years to work in both private and public sectors. In terms of education level, the study suggests that the majority of the respondents had diploma qualifications which imply that many employees still need to go for higher education to enhance their confidence in job performance. According to Karunarathne and Wickramasekara (2020), education level is a good determinant of employees' confidence in job performance.

3.2 Distribution of Respondents by Occupation

The three groups of respondents namely, Records Management Officers, Office Assistants and Human Resource Officers were involved in this study because they also deal with various records in their daily duties in an organization.

For Instance, Records Management Officers receive records, classify them and organize them according to their subject where they belong. Office Assistants work as conveyor belts, are responsible for moving records files from Records Management Offices to the office of human resources where actions are taken and vice versa.

This study interviewed many human resources followed by Office Assistants and Records Managers (Figure 1). This implies that many Human Resource Officers are more involved in personnel records management than should custodians of Records Management (records managers and assistant records staff) do. It is evident from Figure 1 that Human Resource Officers constituted a larger part of the respondents as compared to Records Management Officers and Office Assistants. The researchers conveniently reached a large number of Human Resource Officers because they are the ones who to a large extent deal with the personnel records in making various decisions. Derua (2020) reported that proper record keeping in an organization helps support decision making and increases the efficiency and effectiveness of Human Resource Officers by reducing double standards and biases.
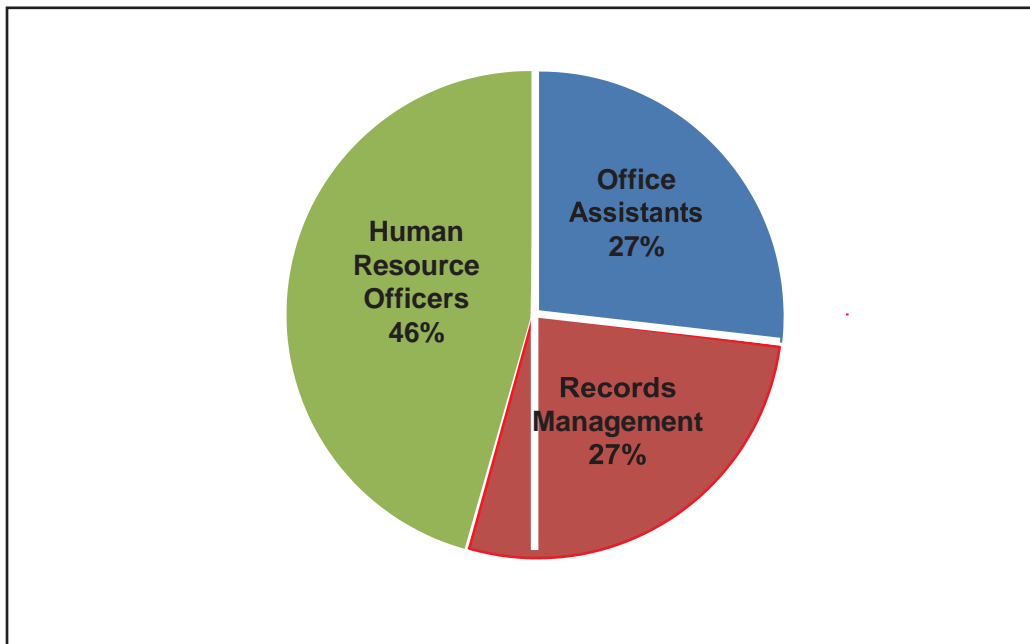

Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Occupation

Additionally, Mubofu et al., (2020) recommended that all types of records in an organization need to be highly protected by all stakeholders such as Human Resource Officers and Records Managers for current and future decision making. Human Resource Officers as part of disciplinary committees need to be fair in all matters related to promotion, demotions, transfers, layoffs and in enforcing discipline to employees and this could only be possible if they refer properly to the documented and preserved records.

3.3 Availability of Personnel Records

Respondents were asked about the presence of personnel records in their departments
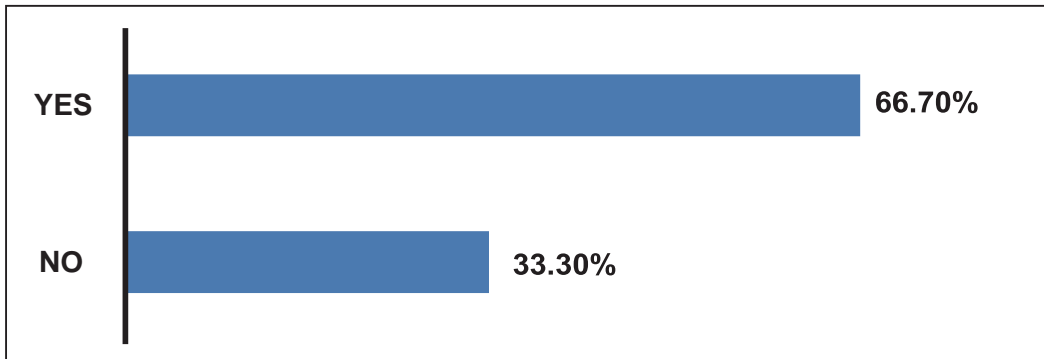
Figure 2: Availability of Personnel Records

Findings revealed that the majority of the respondents agreed that there were several personnel records in their offices while few of them had no personnel records in their offices (Figure 2). This implies that most of the departments have and preserve personnel records instead of using specially designed offices for the management of records. The availability of personnel records in different offices other than the record management offices indicates the poor records management practices at the council and the great risk of leakage of personal information to unauthorized people since many of them are not trained in records management.

3.4 Types of Personnel Records

The respondents were requested to indicate the types of personnel records available in the departments that need to be collected and properly preserved for office use

Table 2: Types of Personnel Records (n = 16)

Types of Records	Frequency	Percent
Appointment letters	5	16.7
Letters of confirmation	5	16.7
Application letters	2	6.7
Training and development records	2	6.7
Copy of birth certificate	1	3.3
Wages and salaries Slips	1	3.3
Health and social security records	1	3.3
Letters of transfer	1	3.3
Notifications of termination/death and retirement	1	3.3
Medical reports	1	3.3

Concerning the types of personnel record available in various departments of Liwale District Council the study found that appointment letters, letters of confirmation, application letters and training-related records were the prominent records managed in the District Council. A further inquiry found that other records present but not in large numbers were copies of birth certificates, wages and salary slips, and health information as well as security records, letter of transfer, notification of termination/death certificates and retirement and medical reports as summarized in Table 2.

Appointment letters and letters of confirmation were the most cited type of personnel records readily available in various departments at Liwale District Council. This implies that the Liwale District Council needs to put measures in place to ensure that personnel records creation, circulation and preservation are properly controlled to ensure the safety and privacy of employee information.

Although, most of the records such as health and social security records, letters of transfer, notification of termination/death and retirement, medical report, wages and salary slips, and copy of birth certificates were the least cited, measures need to be taken to ensure that all personnel records are received, processed, organized, maintained and transferred from one office to another by professional Records Management Officers in the appropriate records management offices in an organization to prevent leakage of employee sensitive personnel records. However, due to time and financial limitations, a physical audit of records at LDC was not conducted.

3.5 Challenges of Personnel Records Management

The study respondents were requested to explain the challenges faced by Liwale District Council in the Management of personnel records. The results show that challenges like shortage of facilities, absence of electronic system, lack of skills in records management, poor records storage facilities, lack of trained Human Resource Officers to deal with the management of records, and lack of internal training on records management practices among records stakeholders were the main challenges in the district. In-depth probing of key informants (Heads of Department) revealed additional challenges such as failure to observe rules and regulations among staff handling records, complaints from customers seeking service from staff, inadequate skills in records management and lack of records management policy.

Table 3: Challenges of Personnel Records Management at LDC (n = 16)

Challenges	Frequency	Per cent
Inadequate and improper storage facilities	5	16.7
Absence of an electronic records management system	4	13.3
Inadequate space for records storage	4	13.3
Human resource officers lack records management skills	3	10.0
Lack of internal training	10	33.3

The lack of adequate and improper storage facilities implies that personnel record keeping is not effective in the study and thus modern equipment and facilities need to be put in place to address this challenge. In the contemporary world, records are preserved in various facilities like cabinets, shelving, computers and institutional repositories all organizations should ensure that all these facilities are in place for effective record keeping. Mohamed, Rasheli and Mwagike (2018) reported that inadequate facilities and equipment for record keeping deter the effective management of records in an organization.

Furthermore, results from the interview also revealed similar findings where the interviewed respondents echoed,

> *"... Generally, the facilities used in keeping personnel records are inadequate and in some cases are not suitable for preservation of vital records that need to be consulted in the future for decision making. For instance, the shelves are open and the files kept can easily be attacked by dust, dirt, insects and other harmful organisms like rats and mice. The few available file cabinets are full of records and have no space for the current records. Although this challenge has been reported to the management no immediate measures have been taken to address the challenge ..."(Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)*

The absence of an Electronic Records Management System implies that electronic records are neglected and are not preserved by the records management offices in Liwale District

Council. The council needs to start planning, procuring and implementing electronic records management systems because currently records are created, processed, shared, disseminated and preserved digitally. Mabera, (2020) noted that among the causes of poor records management in Nigerian Universities is the absence of electronic records management systems.

Additionally, Tsabedze, (2020) conducted a study on e-records readiness in the context of e- government strategy in eSwatini and data collected from nineteen (19) government ministries of Swaziland. The study revealed that employees create electronic records and store them in various formats and keep backup using external drives. This situation is dangerous because employees retire or resign without proper handover or takeover. This kind of electronic records management was also observed to be practised by Human Resource Officers in Liwale District Council where this study was conducted. In such cases, access and retrieval of such personnel records kept and preserved on individual computers in different external drives tend to be a challenge. One of the interviewed respondents had the following to say,

> *"... Up to the moment records management offices don't have electronic records management systems. However, in our short-term plan, the council has set aside funds to train records officers on how to deal with the management of electronic records before the system is implemented. Currently, only a manual system is used to manage the records from the time the record is received/ created to the time it is disposed…" (Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)*

The findings of this study in Table 3 show that failure to observe rules and regulations is another challenge that deters the effective management of personnel records. when

asked what rules and regulations are breached at the records management office Records Officers noted that most staff, especially senior staff, are forced to enter into the closed section even if they are not permitted by the existing rules.

This implies that Records Officers need to create awareness among staff on the adherence to the rules. It is through the enforcement of rules and regulations as well as awareness creation that unauthorized personnel will not enter the records office and thus records and information in it will remain safe.

Complaint from customers has been contributed by excessive leakage of employees information and loss of records. However, the study findings indicate that Liwale District Council has made initiatives to identify and understand the causes of customer complaints which is an important step in problem-solving. Hu et al (2019) reported that the ability to understand the causes of customer complaints is important for records management offices to improve the effectiveness of services. Concerning the leakage of personal information interviewed respondents had this to comment,

> *"… The probable cause of leakage of personal information is the lack of adequate space to accommodate all the files, especially the closed files. There has been a tendency of disregarding the closed files and regarding them as useless as a result they are not well preserved and protected from theft. They are stored in rooms that have no protection which creates a chance for people to access and misuse important personnel records…" (Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)*

Inadequate skills in records management can be reflected in the education level of the study respondents found in the study area whereby the majority had diploma qualification. This indicates that a large number of employees at LDC requires more education level to increase their skills and knowledge which is important for effective service provision.

Effective management of records to a large extent depends on the skills and knowledge that a records keeper has on the management of records (Nwaomah, 2015). These challenges have been caused by a shortage of employees with high education levels to take care of the records at Liwale District Council. Furthermore, the interviewees claimed that the number of employees in the records management profession is very small such that it decreases efficiency in the management personnel records. They contended that they have only five personnel while the actual demand for records management personnel is ten. The interviewed respondents said,

> *"... we need more professional records managers in this council because the current number of records officers is very low compared to the huge responsibilities about records management in open and closed records management offices…" (Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)*

Inadequate space for records storage is another critical challenge in the management of personnel records reported by respondents. This implies that the space available for the storage and preservation of records is not enough to accommodate all the records received by LDC. The interviewed respondents revealed,

> *the rooms in both open and closed records management offices are very small and that they cannot house all the records received. The open records*

> *management office apart from being used as a record processing chamber is also used as an office for Records Managers. This is not healthy because records managers may bring water, food and other snacks that once they drop in the office may attract insects such as cockroaches which are harmful to records. The current offices were not purposely designed and built as records offices so they lack the qualities of a good records management office…." (Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)*

Human Resources Officers deal with the available personnel records when confronted with decision-making needs about an employee. However, Human Resource Officers have the skills of how these records should be properly managed and protected. In this study, it was revealed by 10 per cent of the respondents said, the lack of records management skills among Human Resource Officers was a challenge in the management of records received from the records management offices for action taking. One of the interviewed study respondents echoed,

> *"… Records management skill is highly needed by human resource personnel because almost all universities that offer human resource course lack records management modules and thus graduates of human resources courses lack knowledge on records management. For instance in Liwale District there are 14 Human Resource Officers and most of us graduated from different universities with different education levels but we have no records management skills at all and in most cases, we are the main source for leakage of personal information due to lack of records management ethics…"(Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council).*

Records management policy is an important tool in the management of records in an organization as it guides the Records Management Officers on the management of records in their life cycle. However, in this study, it was revealed that 3 per cent of the respondents noted that the lack of records management policy is a challenge in the management of records at LDC. For instance, Oweghoro, (2015) reported that the absence of a records management policy has a negative impact on the records appraisal practices and the disposal of records. A study by Robyns and Woolman (2011) establishes that university records management policy is a vital tool used to determine the appraisal and value of the information contained in a record.

Lack of internal training on records management practices among records stakeholders was indicated by 33.3 per cent of the study respondents as the challenge in the management of records at LDC. This implies that the respondents in the study area need internal training. Training helps to equip staff with new development in their professionalism. One of the interviewed respondents argued that some of the employees need training in records management since they have been shifted from other departments and now work as Records Officers without any knowledge of records management. Another interviewed respondent had the following to say.

> *"... Despite being few still some Records Management Officers are not knowledgeable in records management issues. They have been transferred from other cadres without any capacity building initiatives to equip them for executing records management duties..."(Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)*

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

Personnel records management is a cornerstone of the decision-making process in an organization regardless of whether the records are in print or electronic format. This study has established that copies of birth certificates, application forms, appointment forms, letters of confirmation, wages and salaries slips, training and development records, medical report, health and security records, letter of transfer, notification of termination/death and retirement were the personnel records found in Liwale District Council.

The study further concludes that inadequate and improper storage facilities, absence of electronic records management system, failures to observe rules and regulations, complaints from customers due to loss of records and leakage of personal information, inadequate skills in records management, and inadequate space for records storage are the challenges faced by Liwale District Council in the management of personnel records. Others include lack of

Human Resource Officers, lack records management skills, lack of records management policy and lack of internal training.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the researchers recommend the following: Qualified records management officers with higher education levels for effective information services need to be employed at LDC. Design and build proper records management offices with enough space to accommodate the records created and those which are received by the LDC.

Reform the human resource curriculums in the country to include an aspect of records management which is vital for the human resource graduates to possess. Conduct capacity development to all employees working as Records Officers without knowledge of records management. Liwale District Council in consultation with other stakeholders should address all the identified challenges faced in the management of personnel records for better decision making.

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