



RECORDS AND ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Archives and records share close affinity except that while the former preserves and makes available for use records of enduring value, the latter is all about organic documents used for current transactions. The social relevance of archives and records is in their usefulness for decision making, day-to-day running of organizations and enhancing efficiency in transactions. That they are vehicles for evidence of past achievements for which present and future efforts seek improvement, valuable evidence in legal proceedings, invaluable academic and research material, the memory of society and reservoir of knowledge, sources of national consciousness and identity, tools for preserving national unity and culture, and sources of useful demographic data add to their value in society.

Introduction

Records are organic documents used for current transactions in organizations. Records are pre-archival collections. All records are potential archival materials, though in reality, not all of them make it to the archives, except those of enduring value. According to Wikipedia (2024), “once records have been selected and transferred to archival custody, they become archives.”

Archives preserve and make available for use records of enduring value. Archiving is very important in organizations because their transactions involve the generation of information materials (records), some of which have enduring value, and so must be archived for future consultations. Records management too, is very important in organizations because by the nature of their transactions, organizations create, maintain and use records (pre-archival collections), and when these records are no longer useful, they are disposed of. Some of the disposed records end up in the organizations’ archives due to their enduring value.

Records management and archives management are important in organizations because they are geared towards the provision of access to the information contained in the

contents of the items they keep. The two practices, records management and archives management, fall within the sphere of information management.

Records Management

Weller (2023) views a record as a content that codifies or documents an official or private undertakings or transactions or deals. Explaining further, the author avers that a record does not include:

... drafts, duplicates or convenience copies of documents. For example, a final response to a proposal is a record, but the drafts, comments about the drafts, and correspondence about the proposal might not be. Personal files are records, as are social media posts and instant messages.

The above is an indication that records can be in formats other than print.

Records management is the art of creating and maintaining records throughout their life cycle. It is sometimes known as records and information management, which according to Weller (2023) is an organizational function responsible for the creation and maintenance of a system to deal with records (in organizations). Records Management (RM) includes everything from the creation of a record to its disposal.

The records management life cycle identified by Weller (2023) is reproduced in Figure 1.

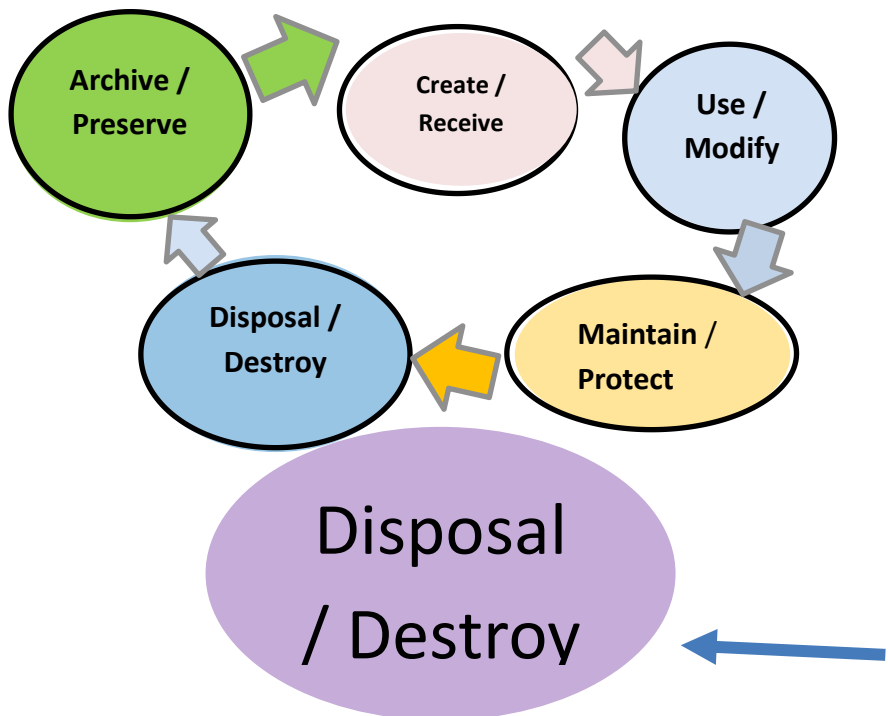


Figure1: Records Management Life Cycle by Weller (2023)

The records management lifecycle is basically the same except that in explanations, authors give different flavours to what it ought to be. Ohio State University Libraries

(2024), for instance, identified six foundational elements of an effective records management programme to include:

1. Records inventory and classification
2. Retention scheduling
3. Records storage and conversion
4. Vital records programme
5. Disaster prevention and recovery programme
6. Disposition

Archives Management

Wikipedia (2024) views archives management as:

...an area of management concerned with the maintenance and use of archives. It is concerned with acquisition, care, arrangement, description and retrieval of records once they have been transferred to the archival repository. Once records have been selected and transferred to archival custody, they become archives.

Wikipedia (2024) identified three steps in the management of archives, which are:

1. Acquiring and receiving from the office of the origin.
2. Arranging and describing according to archival principles and practices
3. Providing easy retrieval and access to archives.

Information Management

Information Management (IM), according to Davis (1997) is the process by which relevant information is provided to decision makers in a timely manner. It is a generic term that covers all the systems and processes within organizations for the creation and use of information. Whether we are talking of records management, archives management or library services delivery, we are concerned with information management.

Information management aims to get the right information to the right person at the right place and at the right time (Robertson, 2005). This is what archives and records management seeks to do.

The Social Relevance of Archives

Archives are a collection of the organic information, items of an institution, be it public or private (or even an individual), which have resulted from its administrative and/or executive activities. Cook (2017) asserts that records can also be similarly defined except that they are only kept for as long as they have operational relevance to the institution which generated them. When records are no longer required for the operations of their parent institution, they are either discarded if found to be no longer useful, or passed to the archives if they have 'enduring' value.

Records therefore are kept for only as long as necessary before their transition to archives if potentially useful, or discarded if in the judgement of the manager they will no longer be required. From the above discourse there is a thin line of divide between archives and records; archives have elastic life span and may exist *ad infinitum* while the records' life span is more- or less inelastic, even though both share the same origin or cradle. Posner (1964:1) attests to this thin line of divide. According to the author, the growth in the quantity of records made it expedient for their separation into two: one-half constitutes the records in constant use for current business transactions, and the other half constitutes the less frequently used but which needs and deserves to be kept permanently. This second half is what is referred to as archives.

Johnson (1991:294) is of the opinion that archives and records play complementary roles but that the images of the one is distinguished from the other as follows: Archives emphasize permanent/continued retention but records are only kept for as long as necessary. Archives have historical value/ information content while records are concerned with statutory, operational and financial transactions. Archives may serve people other than the creators and are kept for purposes other than that which they are created while records serve only the creators and are kept only for the purposes for which they are created. Archives are non-current and emphasis is on the preservation while records are current with emphasis on disposal. Abe (1994:66) attests to the affinity between archives that while records are current media used in the course of transactions in an organization, archives are specialized portion of the records which are no longer current and which having been appraised are selected and kept for future use. For the purpose of this paper, the terms archives and records are used interchangeably.

Archives and/or records can be found either in the private sector or public sector. When records result from public transactions, they are referred to as public records as found in the Public Records Office in Britain, or National Archives in Nigeria. Public records (and archives) are also found in other tiers of government such as state and local governments. When records are for private organizations, say a bank, they form the archives for that bank; and when for an institution, say the university, they form the university's archives.

The existence of records can be said to be as nearly old as when man began to codify knowledge. Their preservation which implies the operation of archives also dates far back in the western world. Daramola (1990:14) traced the archival practices of the Athenians back to the 5th and 4th centuries BC while the Vatican archives existed from as far back as the 3rd century AD. The Athenian archives were kept in the temple of the Mother of the Gods, an indication of the sanctitude with which the early archives were held.

The emergence of modern archives was coeval with the French Revolution of 1789, a period which according to Posner (1964:7):

... legal reasons records became the object of official concern, and when romantic enthusiasm and emerging rationalism began to regard them as monuments worthy of preservation.

In short, the French Revolution sensitized the people to the usefulness of records in their society. From France, the archival movement spread to other parts of Europe, early among which was Britain at the beginning of 1800s, and later to the Americas especially USA, and finally to other parts of the world including the erstwhile colonies. In Nigeria as in other colonies, archival activities existed. This dates as far back as 1914 while a Nigerian Records Office (presently known as National Archives of Nigeria) was established in 1954. The services of the Records Office were sustained until independence and have thereafter experienced considerable development because of the central role archives play in the society.

The Benefits of Archives

The benefits derivable from keeping archives, which in this paper are addressed as the social relevance of archives are many. Records are indispensable working tools for government officials because of what Posner (1964:1) refers to as their “intelligence” value. By intelligence value, Posner means the existence of the past records of government transactions, the use of which will guide the official in taking decisions that are in harmony with past actions, thus ensuring consistency of policies and their implementation. Abe (1994:66-7) supports this assertion with the observation that records of historical value indicating why certain policy decisions were taken in the past are capable of providing valuable guidance for contemporary administration. Posner (1964) reiterates further that the act of governance in the modern state is impossible without recourse to records, be it for everyday transaction or for long-range activities. This is because governance involves decision-taking and effective decision-taking is only possible when information is available, and such information is obtainable most often in the records generated in the course of government’s administrative, executive, legal and legislative transactions. Records are therefore indispensable to those engaged in efficient national planning and administration, as well as vigorous political action. As observed by Jantan (1975:24), records have the potential of contributing significantly to national development if they are properly conserved, managed and utilized. Records are therefore invaluable for the development of economic, legal or judicial, legislative, etc institutions since they are vehicles of evidence for past achievements for which present and future efforts seek improvement.

Just as records are invaluable for developments in the public sector or governance as examined above, they are also invaluable for developments in the private sector for their business transactions. These records are used not only to facilitate management decisions but also as tools that guide employees in the use of their discretions and personal judgments in discharging their everyday responsibilities. Apart from providing its parent body the mechanism to resort to for its decision-making, archives whether in public or private sector, are invaluable evidences in legal proceedings. For example, the

charge of tax evasion against a company can be proved or disproved in court through examining the concerned company's statement of accounts, ledger cards, letters of credit, etc.

The Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science (1968) puts the foregoing in better perspective with the statement that:

As the unique product of the day-to-day activities of an institution, archives have an official and a legal character with respect to the origin, structure, functions, procedures, and transactions of that institution and are essential to the preservation and protection of property and other legal rights of the institution and of other organizations and the individuals that come within the scope of the institution's activities...

In like manner, the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroun over the Bakassi Peninsula was ultimately resolved through resort to the examination of the signed documents and treaties entered into by the colonialists and the respective local administrators concerned during the delineation of boundaries of the two countries. Even for personal land dispute, intra or intercommunal land and other disputes (e.g. chieftaincy), resort may have to be made to archives to resolve them.

Archives are invaluable for scholarly study and academic research which can facilitate the writing of history and tracing of genealogies. In the United States, systematized organization of archives has its origin in the scholarly concern for the availability of original source materials desired especially by the school of scientific historians (Posner, 1964). Among eminent works resulting from the uncritical use of primary archival sources is Ranke's **History of Romance and Germanic Peoples**. Even till today, archival collections are invaluable material for the writing of scholarly works, among them projects, dissertations and theses. Records have also become an important source to which the social scientist must resort to in his attempt to diagnose and interpret the past for the benefit of the present and future. Again, through the critical evaluation of documents in the National Archives, for example, the social scientist can make comparison among the past regimes in Nigeria with a view to analyzing their achievements and failures, explaining why certain decisions were taken, etc. As Prasad (1975:42), and supported by Zaidi (1971:43) contends, a serious study is only possible with the utilization of archival materials.

Archives also constitute a source of national consciousness and identity, according to Jantan (1975:24). The perusal of archival records about the activities of, for the example, the freedom and /or independence movements and exploits of nationalists and heroes can arouse in compatriots a sense of national consciousness and identity which the independence movements created and nurtured to growth. Through the study of archives, one can also have an overview of the contributions of nationalists and statesmen to national development, and can therefore be able to make independent assessment of each

and every statesman rather than rely on oral evidence or secondary sources which may contain strands of prejudice. The knowledge of these contributions can also act as inspiration to younger and oncoming generations to not only take after but also to pursue the ideals of great nationalists and statesmen.

Smart (1975:52) contends that archival materials should be kept for national purposes such as the preservation of national unity and culture. Through archives, oncoming generations will be able to know what efforts the generations before them had made at ensuring national unity, for example, how we survived a civil war and other crises induced by religion, politics, ethnicity, etc because of our common desire to stay together as one nation. These past efforts can act as challenges for oncoming generations to also strive to preserve national unity much as, and probably more than the generations before them had done. The records of our past attempts at promoting culture such as the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture(FESTAC), national cultural festivals, states' festivals of arts and culture etc can also serve as challenges to oncoming generations to strive to promote our culture, thus enabling us to sustain our cultural identity at all times.

The role oral archives has played, and is continuing to play in the documentation of evidence which otherwise would have been left unknown is very significant. For instance, the Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies of the University of Ibadan has a course, **Oral Archives**, the requirements of which students are sent to the field in their local environments to interview, using recorders, elders of their locality on those aspects of their ways of life which have not been documented.

Archives as the memory of society are a reservoir of knowledge and wisdom which have very useful role to play within our educational system, be it for technological and scientific development, social engineering, etc. Records of past scientific, technological and other break-throughs in the educational system in our country will provide the basis for better educational development, be it in the sciences, technology, arts and humanities etc.

The entrenchment or evolvement of a viable archival institution can foster effective public administration, so observed Jantan (1975:24). This is possible when the archivist advocates for and it is accepted as a sound national system of records management. This is to say that archives not only provide the raw materials for development, but that if they are efficiently managed, such management would contribute to the efficiency of government and public sector organizations. In other words, by embracing the concept of records management would presuppose the efficient running of organizations, be they public or private.

Archives, especially public archives hold such invaluable demographic data as records of birth, death, marriages, etc which are very helpful for planning purposes. Other

documents such as certificates of occupancy, deeds of ownership, court judgments, etc held in archives are also very helpful in the resolution of feuds and disputes.

Conclusion

Archives and records have the same origin and are almost synonymous except that records are archives in constant use for current business transactions and archives are the less frequently used records which need and deserve to be preserved permanently due to their enduring value. The existence of archives dates back to the 5th Century in Athens but the modern concept of archives has its origin in the French Revolution that aroused the consciousness of the people to their rights, the knowledge of which could be gotten in records.

Archives are invaluable in several ways. Apart from being useful in decision-making, it is equally helpful in the day-to-day and long-range running of organizations, both public and private. Added to the above is the fact that embracing the culture of records management can bring about efficiency in transactions. Archives are vehicles of evidence for past achievements for which present and future efforts seek improvements, much as they are valuable evidences in legal proceedings, and thus useful in resolving disputes. Being original materials, archives are invaluable for scholarly study and academic research, and as memory of society and reservoir of knowledge, they are useful for educational development in all fields of learning. They are also sources of national consciousness and identity just as they are useful for the preservation of national unity and culture, in addition to holding very useful demographic data.

Perhaps, there is no better way to conclude this write-up than quoting Zaidi (1976:47) who said:

... we cannot write our history if the old records - the raw material of history - are destroyed. For records constitute the memory of our society, the evidence of our experiences, the story of our failures and achievements, the testimony of the growth of our social, economic, political and cultural institutions. In them is hidden the story of the fall and rise of a nation and our degree of "development" is to be judged by the care and attention we give to their preservation and the extent to which we utilize them in reconstructing our past. A nation.... that forgets its past is doomed to live in a state of infancy.

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