



AUTOMATED RETENTION SCHEDULES: THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS IMPLEMENTATION BY UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Records are a rich source of information often receive low priority and not properly addressed in preventing Organisations from risks. It is common that organisations do dispose off records unintentionally or before the records reach its maturity due to the absence of the retention schedule. As organisations with prevailing data and information, universities ought to practice retention schedules to minimize the problems of losing vital information, thus protecting universities from the risks of not being able to produce evident especially when involve in litigation. Automated records retention schedule (ARRS) is paramount as universities are now electronically operated. This study seeks to find out the implementation of automatic retention schedule in universities in Malaysia. The study uses a qualitative research approach with interview as technique to gather data. Findings reveal that lack of training, lack of policies which hinder universities in Malaysia to efficiently embark on electronic records management.

Keywords: *E-Records, Records Management, Records Retention, Retention Schedule*

1. INTRODUCTION

Organisations depend entirely on information to make critical strategic decisions, support innovation and generate revenue. Most of this vital information is available in records, which should not be revealed to unauthorized people nor the competitors of Organisations. These records have to be managed, retained and accessible to fulfill the legal compliance. Therefore, Organisations should designate qualified and well trained personnel to handle and manage this unique, internally generated information [1].

What is a record? ISO 15489 [2] defines records as “information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of businesses”. Records are recorded information regardless of medium or characteristics [3]. According to the University of Washington, records are defined as everything the university community creates, both in hard copy and electronically, and records should not destroyed

unless their retention period is approved by the State Records Committee. Record differs of ordinary information. The record means information that is stored in any tangible medium and is retrievable in perceivable form [4].

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is a challenge to retain hard copy records when organisations are facing space constraints and huge volume and dispersed information. The current force towards electronic record management (ERM) systems is definitely one approach so that one can respond to this specific concern, although the systems are highly pricey and have not been globally implemented. In addition, there are various regulations, rules, and criteria which often determine just how records are to be managed, and to as differ by the categories of settings in which the care is provided, who seem to pay off for a care, and the state in which the process can be found [5].



Although managing university records in electronic format is considered as highly essential, but there are various issues associated with the process. The task of managing records has never been easy, as it requires collaboration among various stakeholders responsible for managing the records. It is evident that the major issues in managing university records revolve around factors such as lack of collaboration, lack of expertise to perform online capturing of data, lack of training and support, and also the absence of policy [6].

Lack of research in records management field focusing on records retention, has resulted in poor or inefficient records management in general and records disposal in particular [7]. Research related to records retention schedule is limited and hence there is an emphasis on bridging the gap in the current literature to ensure that universities realise the importance of records retention schedules and to prevent ad hoc disposal of records and to ensure that the final destiny of records is in accordance with agreed policies and schedules formulated to implement them [8].

The gap of time a file should be maintained to satisfy these demands is referred to as retention interval. Records retention agendas are generally an important portion of a records and information management program. In the simplest style, a records retention schedule determines these records for being managed and talks how long the actual records can be kept. A records retention schedule presents route and help with recordkeeping demands and circumstances.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this study is to examine the perception of record management practitioners about the importance of automated records retention schedule (ARRS) in Malaysian public universities. This objective would clearly illustrate the various perceptions of records management practitioners viewpoints towards the importance of ARRS in records management.

4. RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULE (RRS)

Records retention schedule is commonly created and retained by a records and information management (RIM) qualified professional (in some cases referred to as a Records Manager) utilizing recommendations, industry criteria and methodologies. Records disposal is definitely a

significant aspect of records management and is a key element of any business actions used in the records lifecycle. Disposal can sometimes include the destruction of records or maybe the exchange of records to a new business (normally a great archive) for long-lasting preservation. A strong organization's records disposal program gives authorized schedule methods to get rid and also transfer records that happen to be no for a longer period desired in an office for latest agency business.

4.1 Importance of Records Management in Universities

Records are used as evidence to confirm or claim the public rights and benefits of people. Records also provide individuals with evidence that they could be able to justify government decisions [9]. In terms of recently rapid advancing technology and abundant information, records management plays essential role in assisting government agencies to function effectively in the information [10]. This seeks to regulate and manage records on their life cycle, from their development and distribution, by their filing and use, and eventually to their closing disposal or perhaps permanent retention. In compliance so that one can rightly manage records and makes certain that information can be obtained when and wherever it truly is wanted, in a structured and joyful manner, and in the ideal environment.. Daily news sources covered the importance of properly managing business records, as well as a failure of some Organisations to retain records for specific periods of time, the existence of cases refers to the integration in some emails (Microsoft and many others) [11].

Literature in electronic records management (ERM) in university is at scarce. For instance, a study on ERM in Malaysia indicates that the advances of information technology (IT) have enabled all sectors to improve their information management practices. The study examined the electronic records keeping system adopted and practiced by Malaysian government. It was revealed that there is no clear defined provisions with respect to policies, standards and guidelines for the long term saving of electronic records [12].

The task of records management has been extremely difficult in the context of e-environmental conditions where it becomes essential that the IT personnel or the administrator should possess enough knowledge to perform over the new system [12]. The study led to the identification of major challenges in



the process of successfully managing records in the electronic environment and it has been identified that the major challenge in ERM is the involvement of key management personnel such as managers, activists, IT personnel and administrators. All their personnel are required to work in a collaborative manner so that the integrity, authenticity, reliability and accuracy of the records can be established.

As per a study conducted by Rusnah [13] on the need for education and training in ERM, it has been identified that training is extremely crucial for the management of records electronically in universities. The personnel responsible for the maintenance records should have adequate skills and knowledge to perform the task of capturing data and information electronically. In Malaysia, the education and training for records management are performed by the Faculty of Information Management of the Universiti Teknologi MARA and this is the only institution which provides the training to develop skills concerning ERM. Education and training are critical to enable records personnel are abreast with current best practice [14]. Records related personnel in Malaysia do not possess sufficient knowledge and skills for handling ERM which is considered being the major issue in the country [13].

4.2 Records Retention Schedule (RRS) in Universities

In today's highly competitive world, Universities significantly need to retain and dispose off records efficiently to comply with legislation [15]. Therefore, Universities ought to put in mind the essential role of incorporating retention practices into their business processes. RRS is a plan of action that contains a period of time necessary to retain a record. Records schedules allow Organisations to complete the disposal process of records in a timely, systematic manner by identifying disposal guidelines based on legal, administrative, or fiscal.

Technology has resulted in quick amount of generated information that leads to storage overheads, which warrants the need for the implementation of retention management [11]. In quoting Ricks et al. 1997, Kiggundu [16] asserts that organisations depend on recorded past accomplishments to be able to afford a significant foundation for future development [17]. Inappropriate disposal of records, organisations may face accusations of intentionally destroying some selective records [15].

Records schedule is a list of records that exist in the organisation and the length of time those records must be kept or retained. This is known as retention periods. The retention period is determined based on business needs and on evaluation of legal, regulatory requirements, and Tax [18].

RRS provides a basis for consistent action across the entire organisation and eliminates the need for individual employees to make decisions about the retention of the records which they produce or receive in the course of their work. A comprehensive Schedule, consistently implemented, protects the organisation's interests by ensuring that its business records are: retained for as long as they are needed to enable it to operate effectively [19].

4.3 Benefits of Records Retention Schedule

There is a significant awareness of the importance of the retention schedule. Organisations have many reasons for preparing and implementing a good schedule. One of these reasons, things would not be done completely and correctly if ideas have not been written. A second reason is that it facilitates decision-making and highlight overlaps in functions and records by providing adequate knowledge of the records and information throughout an organization [20].

In addition, retention schedules could reduce monthly bills of off-storage services and the cost of discovery, by controlling and keeping the volume records in storage. In legal cases, RRS is playing a significant role in providing protection through the provision of sufficient evidence, or by providing proof that records are destroyed in a legitimate way [20]. As a result, well documented retention schedule aids organisations in dealing with all these people.

It is evident that universities in the developed countries have a strong history of records management. These universities performed better record retention practices and have established their own record retention schedule. In order to reduce the risk of information breaches, organisations should engage in records management system especially RRS as RRS helps in determining vital and highly valuable records. Records are systematically destroyed and valuable records are well safe guarded [14]; [21].

One more important role the retention schedule plays is ensuring that the university does not keep any unnecessary records, whilst as the same time it prevent the premature disposal of information that it

is required to keep. Retention periods outlined in the schedule are applied to records in whatever medium they are held (paper and electronic) [22]. A retention schedule is a tool that manages the movement of records from one phase to the next. It states the length of time that records must be retained and is based on the idea that all records have a “life cycle”.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In case of the given research, the primary data is collected by conducting interviews with records management Staff administrators in Malaysian universities in order to identify the issues encountered by them while making the electronic records of university’s data. The interview has been conducted with records manager through a well structured questionnaire and their responses have been recorded. In addition to this, the secondary data collection is performed in this research by way of a critical examination of the literature on studies that were conducted in the past by earlier researchers. The information was gathered from seven universities in Malaysia in Klang Valley area.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This study selects Malaysian Public universities as a sample where permission was obtained from management prior to embarking on primary data collection. The rationale for choosing only public universities was mainly to cut down the sample size only to universities situated in Klang Valley. Sample selection is essential because it is not feasible to study the entire population. In Malaysia there is a total of 17 Public universities and out of this 17 public universities, 8 universities are located in Klang Valley area which was the total population for this particular study. So out of the 8 universities the information was gathered from 7 universities. As a result, a sample of public universities in Klang Valley was considered for data collection.

The prime reason for surveying only the universities in the Klang Valley is the ease of accessibility within the limited cost and time frame. The data collected from the survey serves as a snapshot study that provides a general picture about records management practice in general in Malaysia prior to the development of the proposed prototype. The data analysis is not carried out in depth because this data is meant to only provide preliminary information about the need for developing an

automated records retention schedule prototype for the public universities in Malaysia. However, the prototype is not to be discussed in this paper.

The collection of data performed through secondary methods will also be critically analyzed so that appropriate findings can be reached about the given research. The analysis of the data collected is performed as follows:

A. Findings about having a records management policy

Based on the 7 interviews it was very clear that all the universities have a records management policy in the university which indicates that the universities have established some guidelines and policies for effective management of records.

B. Need for specialised knowledge in electronic records management

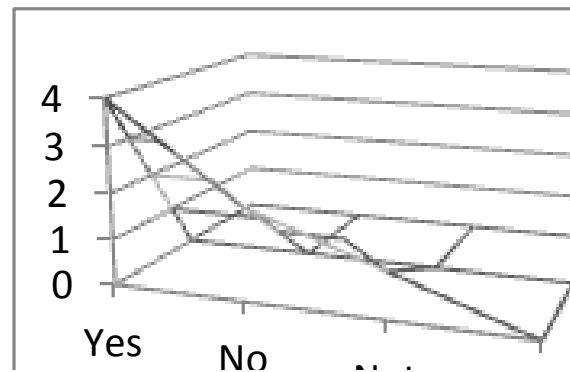


Figure 1: Need for Specialised Knowledge in ERM

From Figure 1, the interview with 7 respondents has resulted into findings that 4 of them have responded that the administrator responsible for electronically recording university data should possess specialized knowledge whereas 2 of the respondents have responded that there is no any need for specialized knowledge for the respondents to perform electronic records of data. However, one of the respondents as interviewed did not either agreed or disagreed about the need for specialized knowledge by respondent to perform electronic recording of data.

C. Improving the competency, transparency, and accountability of organizations

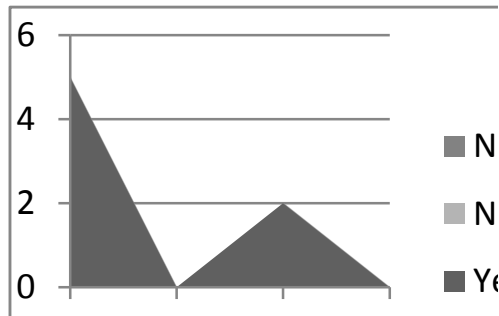


Figure 2: Improving the Competency, Transparency, and Accountability of Organisations

It is shown in Figure 2 that the interview with 7 respondents has resulted into findings that 5 of them have responded that the record management ensures better transparency and accountability in many Organisations . However, two of the respondents as interviewed did not either agreed or disagreed that improving electronic record management would enhance competency, transparency, and accountability of Organisations .

D. Records retention schedule

From Figure 3, the interview with 7 respondents has resulted into findings that 4 of them have responded that the registrar is responsible for developing the record retention schedule whereas 2 of the respondents have responded that there is no record retention schedule with in the university yet. However, one of the respondents as interviewed did not either agreed or disagreed about record retention schedule with in the university.

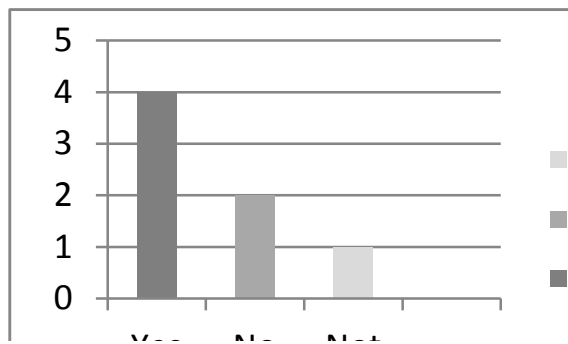


Figure 3: Records Retention Schedule

E. Automation of records retention schedule

The interview with 7 respondents has resulted in findings that all agreed the universities should adopt automated record retention schedule. By having an effective automated record retention schedule it would help the university to improve their current records management process. Overall it is clear that having an automated record retention schedule would enhance the efficiency of record management systems.

F. Findings about the need for training

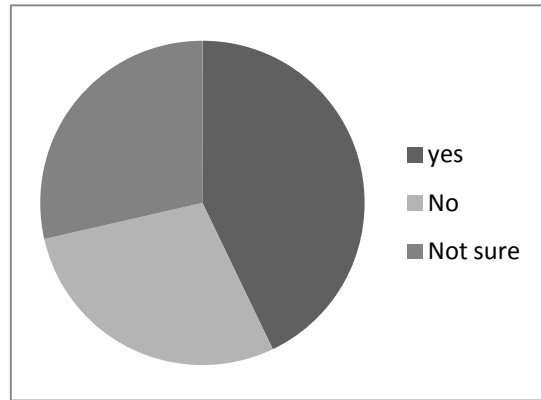


Figure 4: Need for Training

Based on Figure 4, training is considered as highly essential as indicated by the findings 3 out of 7 administrators have responded that training of administrator is essential as it enables them to effectively maintain even higher volumes of data effectively. However, 2 respondents disagreed. Overall, the findings indicate that training is highly essential in enhancing the skills of administrators responsible for performing electronic recording of data.

7. CONCLUSION

In today's world of business, Universities substantially one should hold on to and throw away records proficiently to abide by regulation. For that reason, Universities must put in imagination the primary purpose of making use of retention practices within their business techniques. RRS will be a plan of steps that contains a period of time vital to keep a



document. Records times make it possible for institutions to accomplish a discretion process of records in a regular, scientific style by determining fingertips guidelines based about authorized, administration, or perhaps monetary.

The review of literature as performed indicates there are various issues confronted by records personnel while performing the task of capturing electronic data in universities in Malaysia. These issues include lack of properly framed policies and procedures, inappropriate infrastructures, lack of knowledge, skill and expertise among the personnel handling ERM.

However, organisations engaging in ERM are encouraging. Many organisations from both the private and public sectors are embarking on electronic applications to manage data [23] as a result of government is striving towards the establishment of e-government. Apparently, records management is crucial in helping organisations to improve the quality of service delivery [24] accountability and transparency and remain competitive [23]. Education and training will made this endeavor possible.

In addition, organisations ought to come up with standard procedures to ensure the implementation of ERM is with minimum problems [26]. Thus, is time for universities in Malaysia to embark on ERM in general and automated records retention schedule in particular.

Technology has occurred in speedy amount of money of created information leading for to storage outgoings, which will court warrants the importance for this implementation of retention management [15]. Kiggundu [16] asserts that enterprises rely on documented information beyond triumphs so that can afford a significant base for future development. Wilson [17] affirms that inappropriate disposal of records could cause enterprises to possibly confront accusations of on purpose wiping out a few selective records.

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