

Re-Engineering of Records Management Units of Technical Universities in Ghana: A Case Study of Kumasi Technical University

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ABSTRACT

Records Management plays a key role in the administration of Technical Universities in Ghana. Every staff member in such an institution has personal file which contains personal data on the staff. Moreover, administrative policies, issues and business activities are all stored by the Records Management Unit. However, there has been several instances where files have been lost or could not be tracked nor retrieved on time. This development propelled us to look into the processes and activities of the Records Management Unit to identify bottlenecks in their operations and also for us to reorganize their activities to improve the function of the office. The study used the case study approach and adopted the Records Management Unit of Kumasi Technical University for the research. More so, qualitative approach was implored for the research. It came to fore that the unit does not have electronic back up for records kept by the unit. Processes and operations of the unit are all manually done. We proposed a migration to a paperless in the long run and for the short term the unit should adopt best practices in Records Management.

KEYWORDS: Business Process Re-engineering, Records Management, Files, Digitisation.

INTRODUCTION

Business process Re-engineering (BPR) is the analysis and redesign of workflows within and between enterprises in order to optimize end-to-end processes and automate non-value-ended tasks (Malhotra 1997). BPR is defined by Hammer as “the fundamental rethinking and radical design of business process to achieve dramatic improvements in critical, contemporary measures of performance, such as cost, quality, and service and speed (Hammer et al 1995). In this study BPR is aimed to help the Records Management Unit to fundamentally rethink how it does its work of storing and retrieving files. According to Carl (2005), this can be achieved through adoption of better ways of achieving the target and aim of the Record Management Unit (RMU). Process Re-engineering is redesigning or reinventing how we perform our daily work. It is a concept that is applicable to all industries regardless of size, type, and location. Business Process Re-engineering is a valuable concept for organizations that are willing to undergo dramatic

change and radical process redesign. It can co-exist with ongoing gradual process improvement efforts because not all processes can be radically redesigned at once. BPR has an effect on organisational performance (Malhotra 1997).

Records are a basic tool of Higher Education administration. Records provide information for planning and decision making, form the foundation for accountability. Records are essential for effective and efficient administration, but if poorly managed they can become a liability, hampering operations and draining resources.

BPR in the Records Management Unit is aimed at reorganizing the unit in relation to its processes and activities. This will ultimately strengthen the function of the Unit in accomplishing its major mandates.

Problem Statement

The Records Management Unit of Kumasi Technical University basically deals with the storage and retrieval of files of the University. The University practices a centralized system of filing where all files both personal and subject of the administration are stored by the Unit.

The essence of the storage is to protect and retain information for easy retrieval in future. The files are recorded manually in notebooks for tracking purposes.

Notwithstanding these, files still get missing and vital information needed on files for action are often not retrieved on time.

It is on this backdrop, that we have taken keen interest to look at appropriate modes to re-engineer the operations of the Records Management Unit to inculcate activities that will positively affect the Unit in the performance of its functions.

Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to re-engineer the operations of the Records Management Unit of Kumasi Technical University.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify the bottlenecks in the operations of the Records Management Unit of Kumasi Technical University
2. Develop new processes in the operations of the Record Management Unit of Kumasi Technical University to improve timely retrieval of files.

Research Questions

The research questions to be considered are;

1. What are the bottlenecks in the operations of the Records Management Unit of Kumasi Technical University?
2. What new processes can be developed for the Records Management Unit to improve timely retrieval of files?

Scope

The study was undertaken at the Records Management Unit of Kumasi Technical University in Kumasi, Ghana.

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

Business Process Re-engineering

The first principles and elements of business process Re-engineering can be found in Taylorism (task optimisation) and the scientific management theory. Business Process Re-engineering has been formally defined by Hammer and Champy (1993) as the 'fundamental re-thinking and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements in critical, contemporary measures of performance, such as cost, quality, service and speed".

The concept of BPR as a strategy for creating change and improvement in organizations goes back to the 1980's when there was a concern that the investments in information technology were not producing the results that were desired. Since the 1960's business entities have poured billions of dollars into IT investments to increase effectiveness and productivity (Strassman, 1997).

BPR focusses on redesigning work processes to enhance productivity and competitiveness. The demand for a new approach to company restructuring has been fueled by the awareness that many of the existing business logic is built on premises of considerable age. These existing processes were first designed as a set of sequential manual procedures, and then automated parallel with the accelerating development of technology. However, this automation did not change the strong efficiency orientation pushing for optimizing procedures or functions and a maximum level of control, neither did it address the organizational externalities, such as customer demands.

Records Management

Records management is defined as a "field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records" (ISO 15489-1, 2001, p. 7). The Archives and Information Science perspective further emphasizes the context, provenance, integrity, and authenticity of the records (Yeo, 2007). Records management systems consist of different components like the people, technology and the organization. This is what makes it urgent to not only focus on the technology that facilitates the capture and management of records but also the environment in which they are created. Records differ from other information assets because of the inherent transactional characteristics that make them reliable and authentic (Barbra Reed, 2005). Records are the evidence of actions and decisions, and therefore trustworthy records are the pillars of accountability and transparency. According to (ISO 15489-1, 2001, p. 7) records are "information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business."

Therefore, records attest the transactions that take place in an organization and it is their evidentiary value that makes them different from documents.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher embarked on qualitative research because it was the most suitable method for this investigation. The subject of this study is on the processes and operations of the records management unit which involves people, systems and processes and this combination poses challenges. Qualitative research was undertaken to cultivate a deeper understanding of the issues. Jabareen (2009) argued that qualitative research methods serve as adequate tools for exploring complex phenomena. It offers a rich variety of methodological combinations such as interviews, document analysis and observations.

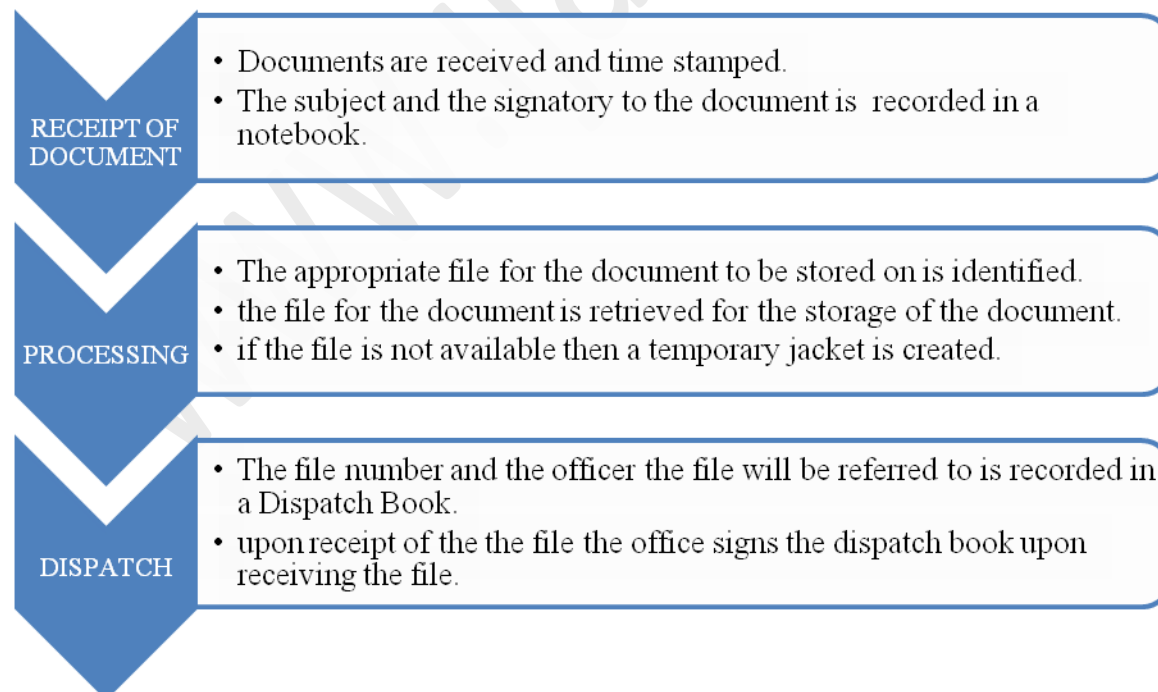
A researcher collects detailed descriptive data through the interactions and conversation with the respondents. The collected data is content analyzed to identify patterns of experiences (Patton 2002). This helps in affirming the authenticity and appropriateness of the inductive content analysis.

FINDINGS

The unit is in custody of 960 personal files and 515 subject files.

The personal files contain personal records and correspondences of staff members and the subject files holds records on administrative and business-related issues of the University.

Processes of the Unit



COMPARISON OF THE PROCESSES WITH INDUSTRY BENCHMARKS

Records to Keep

Every organization needs certain records to function. However, according to Advanced Information Technologies, the volume of paper records doubles every 3.3 years therefore, there is the need to determine what records you have to keep and what records can be tossed.

It was observed that, the unit kept files of staff who have left the service of the university or has died. More so, the records of some staff who have been promoted to the next grade which new files have been opened in respect to that still had their old files. For instance a junior staff, who is currently a senior staff will still have his or her records for both grades.

Inventory of Records

An effective records-management program begins with an audit of every file in the unit. The Unit should know the records they currently maintain.

It was observed that, the unit did not undertake audits to determine the files that are supposed to be in their custody at any particular time.

Document Retention Schedule

The foundation of a records-management program is the retention schedule. There need to be a list of every type of document generated along with its life span.

There was no retention schedule of files in the Records Management. However, once files were full, new volumes were opened and the old one sent to the archives section of the University.

Appropriate Mode to Store Each Type of Record

In this day and age of technological options, there are a variety of ways of permanently storing records: paper, digital (hard drives, cloud etc. In choosing an appropriate storage solution your storage solutions based on these considerations: space, cost, flexibility, safety and integrity. The Record Management Unit however, does no digital storage.

Cabinet storages are used by the Unit and this could pose a great danger in case of a fire accident or water flood. The cabinets are neither water proof nor fire resistant.

Protection of Records from Damage, Loss or Unauthorized Access

There is no getting away from the security and integrity in records management. However, files are kept in cabinets at the Records Management Unit and some files are being kept on cabinets. This poses a great risk and does not conform to industry practices. The probability that these files could get easily damaged is very high.

Files should be kept under lock and should be accessible to officers in charge only or officers bound to take actions on them.

Procedure for Archiving Inactive Records

Records should be regularly evaluated for transfer to archives and long-term storage solutions. The transfer process should include a system to track the location of stored records.

It was observed that files sent to the archives were not appropriately coded and its retrieval was a challenge. Files that could no longer accommodate documents were closed and new volumes were opened. Such files were sent to the archives.

Policy and Procedure for Destroying Expired Records.

Few records need to be or should be kept permanently. They can be destroyed after a predefined period. However, there is no policy in place to regulate the destruction of files. Files are kept perpetually and this worst form of destruction is the removal of the file to the archives section. Kumasi Technical University should therefore draft and adopt a policy in view of the above.

IDENTIFIED BOTTLENECKS IN THE OPERATIONS OF THE UNIT

Manual Recording of Documents and/or Files Received

The manual recording of documents received by the RMU tends to pose a big problem in the event of tracking of the very document. It is very tedious in the tracking of files. The officer spends time going through the book in which it was entered. This makes the search very challenging as most at times the same document will have to be re-produced and in case there is no copy then the document cannot be traced in that material time.

Manual Recording of Files Dispatched

Files that are sent from the Records Management Unit to other offices are to recorded for easy tracking and retrieval of the file. However, this is again done manually in a note book. This makes the tracking quite challenging as pages will need to be flipped over and over to identify the exact office the file was sent. This is also time consuming.

Absence of Electronic Back Up

Aside the hard copies of the documents stored there is no back up of the document digitally. This is a big threat as the Institution can lose all of its records should there be any form of disaster or accident.

Poor Tracking of Documents and/or Files

The key obstacle as indicated from above, is the tracking and locating of files that leaves the RMU. It sometimes takes lengthy time before files are retrieved in a material time. The purpose for the retrieval might become insignificant by the time the file will be retrieved.

Zero Knowledge of the Data Protection Act, 2012 Act 843 of Ghana

Staff of the Unit were not conversant with the Data Protection Act of Ghana. The Act was a gray area for the staff who should have been conversant with it since they will be handling personal records on staff of the University. The Act was promulgated to protect the privacy and personal data of individuals.

PROPOSED PROCESS RE-ENGINEERING OF THE UNIT

Long Term Digitisation and Migration to Paperless Office

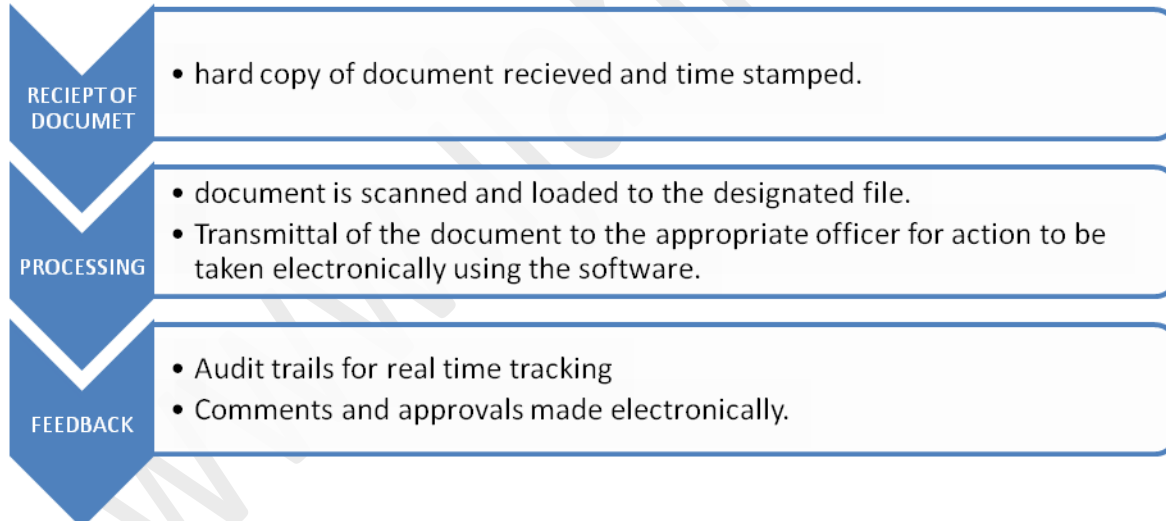
In the long run, it is recommended that the office should be migrated to a paperless office where all records will be digitized and actions on documents could be made digitally, the FileHold software can be of great importance for the migration. This software has a rating of 4.57 out of 5 on the software advice website.

An overview of the software on softwareadvice.com indicates that FileHold Enterprise is a document management solution that helps large organizations to transition to a paperless work environment. FileHold can be installed on premise or on a secure private or public cloud.

Features include multi levels of security, user audit trails, forms processing, e-signature, full text search, document scanning and optical character recognition (OCR). Alerts and reminders are generated for document-related events such as contract renewals, overdue workflows and records scheduled for archival and deletion.

The workflow feature moves electronic documents through review and approval processes, which are tracked by reporting tools. Workflows can be generated by any user, or generated automatically when a document is added to the library. FileHold Courier allows anyone with an email address to receive and approve documents from FileHold.

Moreover, according to the same website FileHold is mobile-device ready, and it comes integrated with Microsoft Office or, optionally, SharePoint and Active Directory.



Short Term

Records Storage

Records should be stored in such a manner so as to facilitate user access and ensure that they are protected from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, removal, deterioration, loss or destruction. The Records Management Unit should lay down guidelines on the storage of records including sensitive or classified records. For records in paper form, the unit should note that paper deteriorates rapidly in an environment of high temperature and humidity. Furthermore, mould growth on paper can be a health hazard to staff.

Access

The unit should ensure that timely access to records is provided to authorized users for conducting business. On the other hand, to provide sensitive information with adequate protection, records should be classified according to their level of sensitivity at a particular time. The unit should also lay down guidelines on the protection, processing and transmission of classified records.

CONCLUSION

This study provided evidence for an insight into the operations of the Records Management Unit of Kumasi Technical University. Based on the findings of the study, appropriate processes have been recommended to be substituted for the original activities which in turn will eradicate the bottle necks hampering the performance of the Records Management Unit.

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