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**Competencies Required of Secretaries to Manage Records Life
Cycle in Government Offices in Anambra State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

This study determined basic records life cycle management competencies required by secretaries in offices. The population was 298 secretaries. Structured questionnaire was used. The instrument was validated by three experts. Its internal consistency was determined using Cronbach Alpha and the result was a high reliability coefficient of 0.75. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation, while t-test was used to test the null hypothesis. The findings of the study showed, that secretaries require all the basic records lifecycle competencies identified by this study. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made including that the training institutions should ensure that they incorporate into their curriculum offerings to prepare graduates for management of records in offices.

Introduction

Innovations in office technology have affected every aspect of human life in recent times. The various professional services are seriously adjusting to the ethics and modes of operation that can stand the test of time. These changes have affected the level of competencies and skills needed by employers in the labour market. Organizations need secretaries who can plan, coordinate, control and implement organizational activities and this cannot be possible without effective record management practices. There is therefore, the need for secretaries to identify the competencies required to manage records life cycle in offices.

Competence is the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified, having the ability to perform a specific role. Competence is the ability to do something well. It is also a skill that one needs in a particular job or for a particular task (Hornby, 2001).

According to Yusof and Chell (2000), the life cycle of records is an important concept in records management. It is a way of looking at how records are created and used. The life cycle is based on the idea that records become less important as time passes. Chukwuma (2006) opined that the first stage of every record is creation. In an organization, many records are created or received from outside the organization on a day-to-day operation of the organization's business. Examples of records generated in an organization are directives, memo, correspondence, forms, drawings, computer printouts, and so on. The records of any organization must be controlled. After creation, records are sent or distributed to persons who use any or work on them. The distribution may be within an organization or between an organization and the external public. The right records are sent to the right persons, at the right time, in the right formats, at the lowest costs. The received records are utilized for making references; as legal requirements, documentary responses among others.

Kanzi (2010), defined record as the information captured for re-use at a later stage as evidence of an activity or action undertaken, and a basis on which future decisions are made.

Records are classified, used, processed and housed. If they are not classified to a records management, retrieval for future use is very difficult. To store documents, it is necessary to control the stage of the life cycle of the documents. The documents which are regular in use should be housed within the generating offices or inside the offices where they are used or in the records office.

Agree, Lemieux and Mazikana, (1999), submitted that records could be classified into three types, namely: current records, semi-current records and non-current records. According to them, current records are those which are in active use. Semi-current ones are those records used infrequently, while non-current records are those which are no longer in active use and are kept in order to satisfy legal and audit

statutory provisions or for research purposes. When the records are no longer referred to occasionally, and are considered worthy of permanent preservation, they are referred to as archives, and are transferred from records centre to Archival Institution (Archives). With the aid of “retention and desposition schedules” records that have no permanent value are separated from those records of enduring archival value.

“Records retention and disposal” is an analytical process concerned with the economics derived from the use of high density, low cost storage of an archives and the timely destruction of obsolete or ephemeral records. This management process makes use of record inventory and scheduling, records appraisal, file classification systems, record centres, disposal schedule and transfer to the Archives. Deartyne (1985) stated that records are created for some purposes and can have either a short term or enduring (archival) value. Records with an enduring value should be preserved because they provide a framework for an understanding of the past.

Ohakwe (2012) suggested that the idea of information life cycle is derived from records management, where the idea of document life cycle is central to the overall process. The life cycle of records includes the following steps;

- i. Design and creation of records
- ii. Identification
- iii. Authorization
- iv. Verification, validation, auditing;
- v. Circulation, access, loan, use;
- vi. Back-up procedures and disaster recovery plans;
- vii. Retention schedules and destruction

Chukwuma (2006) stated that the lifecycle vary from organization to organization depending on the nature of the information, the means used to organize it, the extent of use and the controls put upon use. Zawiga and Chell (1998) noted that the general philosophy of records management is all about getting the right information, in the right form, to the right person at the right time, in the right place to take the right decision. Good records management ensures that records are kept as evidence of decision making and day-to-day operations. However, where these are lacking, the confidence level of the decision maker may be reduced thereby resulting to delays with the attendant loss of business opportunities. They added that this should be achieved at the lowest cost.

Records management has attracted increasing attention in recent years as a result of growing sophistication of administrative practice in the increasing complexity of organizations, coupled with the enormous expansion of the quality of information. This means that in order to manage the life cycle of records in offices, secretaries should have the needed knowledge and competencies. The researchers was motivated

to determine those competencies required by secretaries to manage records life cycle effectively in the office.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the competencies required of secretaries to manage records life cycle in offices.

Research Question

The study is guided by one research question: What are the competencies required of secretaries for managing records life cycle in offices?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female secretaries on the records life cycle management competencies required of secretaries in offices.

Method

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. This design was considered most appropriate for the study because survey studies utilize questionnaire as a tool in obtaining information. The secretaries in the state formed the population of this study. Respondents were asked to rate each of the items on a four-point scale as follows: often required (4) sometimes required (3) rarely required (2) never required (1). The instrument for data collection was validated through expert judgement. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach alpha. The instrument yielded approximated reliability indice of 0.75. The boundary limit of 2.50 was used to determine the acceptability of questionnaire items. Any competency with a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered required and a competency with a mean score below 2.50 was considered not required by the secretaries.

The researchers administered the questionnaire with the help of two research assistants who returned same within two weeks of administration. The entire copies of the questionnaire were returned and used for analysis. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

What are the competencies required of secretaries for managing records life cycle in offices?

Table 1: Mean Ratings on the competencies required of secretaries for managing records lifecycle in offices.

| S/N | ITEMS | X | SD | DECISION |
|-----|--|------|------|----------|
| 1. | Competencies in creating records | 3.50 | 1.13 | Required |
| 2. | Ability to control records movement | 4.00 | .00 | Required |
| 3. | Ability to maintain records | 3.75 | .59 | Required |
| 4. | Competencies in distributing records to people | 3.25 | 1.17 | Required |
| 5. | Competencies in utilizing records for reference and legal requirements | 3.75 | .44 | Required |
| 6. | Competencies in classifying records for proper utilization | 4.00 | .00 | Required |

The results in Table 1 show that secretaries required all the records life cycle management competencies studied. All the items achieved mean scores above 2.50.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female secretaries on the records lifecycle management competencies required of secretaries in offices.

Table 2: t-test results of difference between the mean responses of male and female secretaries on the records life cycle management competencies required of secretaries in government offices.

| S/N | Category | X | SD | N | t-cal | t-crit | Decision |
|-----|----------|------|------|-----|-------|--------|----------|
| 1 | Male | 4.00 | .00 | 99 | 8.15 | 1.96 | Reject |
| | Female | 3.24 | 1.30 | 199 | | | |
| 2 | Male | 4.00 | .00 | 99 | 8.15 | 1.96 | Reject |
| | Female | 3.24 | 1.30 | 199 | | | |
| 3 | Male | 3.49 | .81 | 99 | 4.17 | 1.96 | Reject |
| | Female | 3.87 | .33 | 199 | | | |
| 4 | Male | 4.00 | .00 | .99 | 12.53 | 1.96 | Reject |
| | Female | 2.86 | 1.27 | 199 | | | |
| 5 | Male | 4.00 | .00 | 99 | 10.94 | 1.96 | Reject |
| | Female | 3.62 | .48 | 199 | | | |
| 6 | Male | 4.00 | .00 | 99 | 12.53 | 1.96 | Reject |
| | Female | 2.86 | 1.27 | 199 | | | |

The results of t-test analysis in Table 2 showed that the critical t-value for all the items were less than the calculated t-value at 0.05 level of significance. Based on the results of the analysis, the null hypothesis which states that; there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female secretaries on the records life cycle management competencies required of secretaries in offices was therefore rejected. This implies that male and female secretaries have different opinions on the records lifecycle management competencies required of secretaries in offices.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that secretaries required all the listed basic competencies to manage records life cycle in offices. The details of the competencies included; creating records, controlling the movement of records, maintaining records, distributing records to people, utilizing records for reference and legal requirements, classifying records for proper utilization. The findings were in support of the views of Ohakwe (2012) who reported similar records lifecycle management competencies among the secretaries he studied. Adibe (2005) and Okolo (2007) also maintained that the overall aim of records management is to provide the right information to the right people or machine at the right time and place. Consequently, office personnel should possess the competencies required to do this.

The null hypothesis test revealed a significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female secretaries. The findings are in line with the views of Lynch (2007) who argued that some competencies are gender sensitive and could influence differently. He did not however specify the competency areas that are gender sensitive.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study it is clear that secretaries require all the records life cycle management competencies studied to manage records in the offices. Organizations can therefore only employ those who possess the basic competencies of records life cycle managements.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is hereby recommended that:

1. The training institutions should ensure that they instruct trainee secretaries on competencies needed to manage records effectively and efficiently in offices. This should also be incorporated into the office technology and management curriculum.
2. Government should recognize the need for proper records management competencies and its benefits to the progress of any organization. Consequently, she has to provide considerable national resources both financially and otherwise.

3. There is need for various forms of in-service trainings in the area of records management especially in government offices to equip secretaries with the competencies required to manage the offices.

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