

23rd ESARBICA General Conference



The banner features the National Archives of Zimbabwe logo on the left, which includes a coat of arms and the text "NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ZIMBABWE". To its right is the ESARBICA logo, a stylized 'e' inside a circle with the text "ESARBICA". The main title "ESARBICA CONFERENCE 2015" is displayed in large, bold, yellow and blue letters. Below this, the theme "Archives Uses, Abuses and Underutilization" is written in a smaller font. A photograph of Victoria Falls is shown on the left side of the lower half. The dates "8-12 JUNE TWENTY FIFTEEN" and the location "VICTORIA FALLS, ZIMBABWE" are prominently displayed in bold, black and yellow text.

ESARBICA CONFERENCE 2015

Archives Uses, Abuses and Underutilization

8-12 JUNE TWENTY FIFTEEN

VICTORIA FALLS, ZIMBABWE

Dilemma in the disposition of e-mail records in public departments in Zimbabwe: The case of the Midlands Province

by

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1.0 Introduction

- The dawn of e-mail - a great relief to communication today.
 - Communication now easy, fast and at reasonable cost.
 - E-mail now the nerve centre of many organizations' communication and information policy and strategy.
 - Nevertheless, managing e-mail records has posed numerous challenges, leaving records & information practitioners on the horns of a dilemma:
 - whether to preserve or destroy official e-mail records.
 - whether or not to appraise e-mail records before disposition.
 - whether to preserve e-mail records on the computer system or print to paper or save on external storage devices.
 - whether to keep e-mail print-outs and external storage devices in storerooms or transfer them to Records Centres.
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1.1 Problem statement

- E-mail - the de facto standard for business communication in both public and private organizations.
- Like other records, e-mail records enhance good governance, accountability, transparency and informed decision-making.
- Unfortunately, e-mail records are poorly disposed in many public organizations, leaving such organizations devoid of records with administrative, informational and evidential value (Nengomasha and Beukes-Amiss:2002; Keakopa: 2007; Nengomasha: 2009).

- This places records & information practitioners between a rock and a hard place and on the horns of a dilemma as they juggle between options as to how they should professionally dispose official e-mail records.

1.2 Objectives of the study

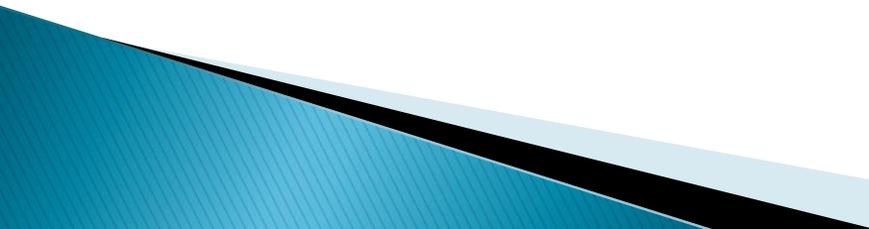
- To examine the current scenario concerning disposition (transfer and destruction) of e-mail records in public departments in Zimbabwe.
 - To outline e-mail records disposition dilemmas that public sector records practitioners face in Zimbabwe.
 - To assess the root causes of the dilemma.
 - To make recommendations on how to improve disposition of official e-mail records.
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1.3 Originality of the study

This study is important because:

- E-mail management warrants special focus due to its widespread and substantive use within organizations (Nengomasha: 2009).
- The use of e-mail as a means of communication is increasing on a daily basis, thus making it pertinent to focus energy, time and resources on such an area- (Department of Arts and Culture –RSA: 2006).
- Many countries do not have clear guidelines on how to deal with the management of e-mail records, despite its use in day to day administration of many organizations (Keakopa: 2007; Nengomasha: 2004 & Nengomasha and Beukes-Amiss: 2002).

1.4 Delimitations of the study

- The study was restricted to destruction of transitory e-mail records and the transfer of valuable e-mail records to secondary storage for example, storerooms and Records Centres.
 - The study was also restricted to government ministries and departments in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe.
 - This excluded other public departments, namely statutory bodies and local authorities.
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3.0 Literature review

3.1 Official and non-official e-mail

- An e-mail refers to mail sent or received electronically.
- E-mail is divided into official and non-official mail.
- Official e-mail is non-personal and involves correspondence to do with the tactical and strategic administration of an organization eg. policies and directives, correspondence, work schedules, agendas, minutes and reports.
- Non-official e-mail includes personal messages, junk mail and announcements of social events.

3.2 Advantages of e-mail: Cheap, fast, easy to use, reliable and secure and allows one to attach large volumes of data, without additional cost.

Disadvantages: information overload, computer viruses, e-mail fatigue and security threats (Medina: 2013).



3.3 Approaches to managing e-mail records

3.3.1 Printing to paper

- Printing to paper is the commonest approach (Wallace: 2001; Commonwealth of Virginia: 2009).
- The e-mail print-out is given the same treatment as original paper records as regards appraisal, preservation, retention, destruction and transfer.

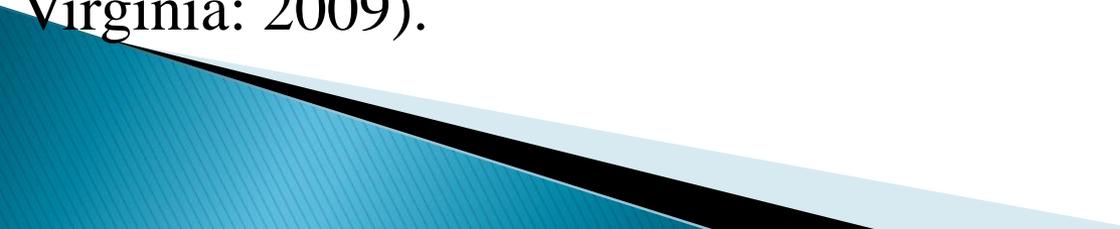
3.3.2 Managing e-mail within an e-mail system

In this approach, there are three types of folders namely a personal folder (for non-official mail), public folder (for official mail) and a shared folder (for special projects within the organization).

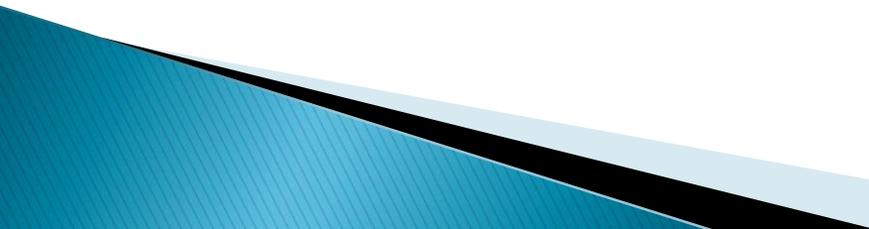
3.3.3 Integrating e-mail messages into a document management system

- E-mail can also be managed within the Integrated Documents
- and Records Management System (IDRMS).
- Advantage- it protects the authenticity of e-mail in the same way as it protects the authenticity of all other records.

3.3.4 Creating folders that are stored outside the mailbox

- Designated folders are created and different e-mail messages are assigned to the appropriate folders.
 - Advantage- it uses existing technology, but because it is not a records management tool, it has no global search capabilities (Commonwealth of Virginia: 2009).
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3.4 Records disposition

- Act of destroying or transferring e-mail records
 - Destruction is whereby ephemeral records are deleted in the case of e-records and burnt or shredded in the case of paper records.
 - Transfer of e-mail records takes two forms:
 - (i) from one system or medium to another, with due respect to their authenticity, integrity and usability.
 - (ii) transferring e-mail messages onto external storage devices like optical disks, floppy disks and magnetic tapes which are in turn taken to storerooms or records centres for secondary storage.
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4.0 Research methodology

- Qualitative study
 - Survey research design.
 - Data collection method: Questionnaire
 - Population: 45 Records and Information Officers from 45 government ministries and departments in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe
 - Sample: 22 officers from the 45 departments
 - Sample size of 49%.
 - Sampling method: simple random sampling.
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5.0 Findings of the study

5.1 Creation and receipt of e-mail records

- All 22 informants expressed that their departments created and received e-mail records.
- However, 15 of them expressed that the rate of creation and receipt of e-mail records in their departments was so low that at times only 8 to 10 records were created or received in a month.
- **Commonest types of e-mail records:**
 - Official correspondences (10), Minutes (5)
 - Policies (4), Circulars (3)
- There were no restrictions as to who created e-mail records.
- The situation was different with receipt of official e-mail records.
Responsibility of Records Officers (12 depts), IT officers (7 depts), HODs (3 depts).

NB: Only these officers had the password.

5.2 Dilemma in destroying, saving and transferring e-mail records

- 15 informants (68%) - often tempted to destroy e-mail messages soon after reading them or after relaying the messages to their intended recipients.
 - Only 7 informants (32%) saved the messages straight away.
 - The table below shows difficulties informants faced in destroying and transferring records.
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Table 1: Difficulties informants faced in destroying and transferring e-mail records

Action	Faced difficulties	Did not face difficulties	Total
Destroying	15	7	22
Transferring	18	4	22

Table 2: Informants' options in destroying e-mail records

Option	Frequency	%
Destroy paper print-outs	16	73
Delete messages from the Inbox	6	27
Delete e-mails from the E-Mail Management System	0	0
Delete messages from the Document Management System	0	0
Delete messages from folders created outside the Inbox	0	0
Total	22	100

•**Interesting revelations**

- 16 informants (73%) claimed they always destroyed e-mail messages
- only 6 informants (27%) saved such messages regardless of their importance.

•**What guided the action to destroy?**

- 12 informants (55%) - space challenges on the computer system
- 4 informants (18%) - used their own discretion
- 6 informants (27%) –appraised the e-mail records first.

5.3 Transfer of e-mail records

- transfer of e-mail records was more through making paper print-outs (73%)
- 27% transferred e-mail messages from the Inbox to external storage devices like compact disks and flash disks, but the devices had never found their way to Records Centres.

Table 3: Transfer of paper print-outs and external storage devices

Secondary storage location	Paper print-outs	External storage devices
Records Centre	17	-
Storerooms	5	9
Cupboards	-	8
Other	-	5
Total	22	22

Interesting findings about transfer of e-mail records

- No external storage devices had hitherto been transferred to the Records Centre.
- E-mail messages mainly saved on CDs and flash disks and relegated to the cupboards in creators' offices (8), storerooms (9) and HOD's cabinets (5).
- The case was rather different with paper print-outs, where 17 informants claimed that they transferred e-mail paper print-outs to the Records Centres while 5 kept in storerooms.

5.4 Causes of the dilemma in disposing records

- 9 informants (41 %) blamed it on ever-changing technology.
- 5 informants (23%) blamed it on lack of knowledge about ICTs and electronic records management, areas which were not fully covered in the formal training programmes
- 8 informants (36%) blamed it on the NAZ, which they accused of failing to stamp authority on how e-records were supposed to be managed.

6.0 Discussion of findings

Management of e-records (including e-mail) is dented because of:

- The poor regulatory and legal framework- NAZ Act (1986)- Dube (2011) and Mutsagondo and Chaterera (2014). Kamatula (2010) and Nasieku (2012)- policies and guidelines to manage e-records are many times non-existent, weak or out-dated in the developing world.
 - Deficiencies in ICT and e-records management skills - Chaterera (2012) and Nasieku (2012). Tsvuura and Mutsagondo (2015) Common trend-provincial and district public offices are normally manned by staff not trained in records management.
 - There is no framework in place for the management of e-mail records in the developing world as in the developed world (Nengomasha: 2009).
 - The cart has been placed before the horse, resulting in individual institutions resorting to own management style as suiting their skills, resources and intuition.
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7.0 Conclusion

- The management of e-mail records needs to be seriously addressed in order to cover all aspects of managing such records, that is, creation, receipt, use, maintenance, transfer and destruction.
- Destruction and transfer of e-mail records deserve special treatment as they dictate the availability of records in the future, a weapon to guard against litigation, fight corruption and shoddy deals and a tool to foster accountability, transparency and informed decision-making.
- The current position where each public department manages its e-mail records according to its own discretion and resources is unacceptable. It is a time bomb that threatens the profession of archiving and as such, it should be stopped right in its tracks.

8.0 Recommendations

- National archival institutions should craft e-mail records management policies, which the public sector should religiously follow.
- Archival institutions should monitor and supervise e-records practices in public departments in the same manner they do with paper records.
- The public sector to make investments in e-mail management software as well as modern ICTs.
- Investments should also be made in skills development, especially in the realm of ICTs and ERM.
- Uncalled for destruction of e-mail records should be stopped forthwith, lest public organizations will in future find themselves without records of administrative, evidential value and research value.
- Organizations still caught on the horns of a dilemma due to infrastructural and human resources challenges should in the interim continue printing to paper e-mail records and let their records officers treat them in the same manner as they treat original paper records.