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## Challenges facing Records Management: A case study of Botswana Examinations Council Records Management Unit

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper is extracted from a Master's dissertation titled, "An evaluation of customer satisfaction at Botswana Examinations Council Records Management Unit". The paper presents the partial findings of the study, which is, the challenges faced by the Records Management Unit (RMU). The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach with survey, interviews, participant observation and document review as data collection methods. Data for challenges was collected using a questionnaire followed by a semi-structured interview. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of this study revealed that the Botswana Examinations Council (BEC) RMU faces challenges as lack of top management support, inadequate funds, inadequate staff, lack of training, and limited promotion opportunities for staff. The study recommends top management to support the RMU, adequate funding and staffing, training for RMU officers, and opportunities for staff promotion in order to improve the service delivery at BEC RMU.*

**Keywords:** Customer satisfaction, Service quality, Records management, Botswana Examinations Council

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## **Introduction**

Records are very significant for an organisation and its customers. Relationships between organisations and their customers are usually supported by information or evidence which is generated as the parties interact with each other. In other words, records are the link between an organisation and its customers. Therefore, it becomes very critical for an organisation to have proper and efficient record-keeping methods. Information and records should be generated and maintained systematically to allow effective information exchange between an organisation and its customers. However, effective information exchange between an organisation and its customers calls for effective and best practices in records management. Meeting and exceeding customer's expectations lead to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customer satisfaction is a key element of any organisational strategy as customers are a central part of all services. Their loyalty is earned by means of excellent customer service. Bad customer service ruins the reputation of an organisation and affects its service delivery leading to poor performance of the whole organisation. This study was undertaken at Botswana Examinations Council Records Management Unit. BEC Records Management Unit is the heart of the organisation, it is vital for its personnel to know and practice good customer service.

BEC RMU attends to both internal and external customers and they are both important to the organisation and need to be managed properly. Internal customers, who are the employees of BEC, always call or visit the RMU for information stored in the files and for files and folio numbers when they respond to correspondence from its clients. External customers include schools, examination and assessment centres, media houses, teachers, students, parents, courier companies, individuals seeking services and stakeholders like policy makers, tertiary institutions, teachers unions, accreditation bodies, suppliers and regional and international examination boards (BEC Communications Strategy, 2013). Since the RMU is in charge of the incoming and outgoing mail on behalf of the organisation external customers mostly visit the RMU to hand deliver and collect mail.

According to (Botswana National Archives and Records Services, 2009), a revolutionary development in Botswana's records management emanated from the 1985 Organisation and Methods Review of the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs. The Permanent Secretary to the President's Circular No.4 of 1992 established the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (well known as BNARS) to provide records management services to government. Its mandate involves managing all public records throughout their life cycle, from creation to disposition. This is achievable

through archives and records management administration functions. BNARS coordinates records management functions through Records Management Units (RMUs) and Records Centres by ensuring that records are available for use when needed; that redundant records are destroyed regularly according to existing disposal guidelines and procedures and that records of continuing value are transferred to the national archival repository for use by researchers and the public (BNARS, 2020). BEC is not an exception in this regard as it is a public-funded institution. This study aimed at finding out the extent to which BEC's Records Management Unit satisfies its users.

### **Botswana Examinations Council:**

Botswana Examinations Council (BEC) is mandated under section 5 of the Botswana Examinations Council Act (Act No. 11 of 2002) as amended by the Botswana Examinations Amendment Act, 2019, to manage, conduct examinations and assessments in general education and technical, vocational education and training and to award certificates in respect of the said examinations and assessments (BEC Annual Report, 2019/20). The mission of BEC is to provide a credible and responsive assessment and examination system while its vision is "To be a provider of accessible and globally competitive qualifications". BEC has four core values, namely: Excellence, Integrity, Transparency and People Focus (BEC, 2020). All services provided by BEC are centralised because it is the only examination board in Botswana. BEC's four key business areas are to; develop, administer, accredit and certify examinations (Act No. 11 of 2002). BEC is organised into six directorates: Product Development and Standards, Examinations Administration and Certification, Research and Policy Development, Corporate Services, Information and Communications Technology and Human Resources (BEC Annual Report, 2019/20).

### ***Statement of the problem***

Proper records management improves the quality of service delivery of an organisation (Viegas et al., 2019; Ndubisi & Nwankwo, 2019). This means that the organisation will be able to serve the customers effectively with information that will be valid and reliable. Hilinski (2021) posited that records management helps organisations in achieving better results and improving overall efficiency. However, a study by Manewe-Sisa et al. (2016) revealed that even though customers at the Records Management Unit at the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs (MLHA) in Botswana are generally satisfied with the service offered, they are also faced with some challenges in trying to access services of their RMU. The problems include files arriving late to action officers, misfiling of documents, lack of feedback, misplacement

of files, and failure to track files when needed. Hence, the RMU does not benefit from the feedback from the customers.

***Purpose and Objectives of the study:** The main purpose of the study was to evaluate customer satisfaction at BEC RMU. To achieve the main purpose, one of the specific objectives of the study was to determine the challenges faced by the BEC RMU.*

## **Literature Review**

### **Concepts of Records Management and Benefits**

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 :2016). It focuses on managing records to meet and support business needs. It ensures that only records that are required are being kept. It also ensures that records are easily retrieved and that they are available when needed. Records management is concerned with customer satisfaction. BNARS (2020) observed that the quality of the services which Government bodies deliver to their customers depends on how well they can create, store, retrieve, use and manage relevant information. It is needed to support decision-making, for general operation, as evidence of policies and activities. Records management plays a very critical role in ensuring good governance. Well-managed records are essential tools for good governance. They facilitate the achievement of transparency and accountability in public administration. Governments rely on records to make precise decisions.

Some of the benefits of good records management as outlined by BNARS (2020): it promotes timely access to organisational information required to make informed decisions thereby enhancing organisational performance; providing evidence of business transactions or activities carried out by public institutions. Records are a source of accountability and transparency in any organisation; facilitate the performance of activities throughout an organisation; protect the rights of the organisations, their employees, and customers; provide continuity in the event of a disaster and protect records from unauthorised access. Thus, records management cannot be separated from customer satisfaction.

### **Challenges facing Records Management Units**

Despite the important role played by records management, registry systems are not functioning well in many countries in the ESARBICA region leading to the haphazard

opening of files, absence of indexing systems, and no means of tracking file movements (Ngulube & Tafor, 2007). Thomas (2009) added that insufficient filing and indexing of information for future retrieval generates unnecessary costs as staff waste valuable time trying to locate information. It then takes more time to respond to customer needs. Hilinski (2021) also pointed out that records management strategies help keep organisations efficient and productive. Without proper records management strategy, organisations experience miscommunication and loss of data.

**Lack of Policies:** Records management policy is very essential in the implementation of records management best practices. According to BNARS (2020, p.35) Records management policy “is meant to provide authority for the development and implementation of a records management programme that will encourage the creation and management of authentic, reliable, complete and usable records, capable of supporting business functions and activities for as long as they are required”. The records management policy should compel all employees to create and maintain records that meet the legal, regulatory, economic, operational, and archival or historical needs of the organisation (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2014).

**Lack of top management support on records management:** Top management support is critical to the success of records management in an organisation. According to Mwangi (2017) implementation of proper records management systems relies on top management support. The author further said that the attempts to implement proper records management systems would fail without managerial support.

**Lack of awareness of the importance of records management:** Lack of awareness of the importance of records management by an organisation leads to poor service delivery. There should be an awareness of customer service standards of the RMU and any other document governing records of an organisation. Mampe and Kalusopa (2012) attested that for a records management programme to be successful there should be some level of awareness of the procedure, policies, and standards governing the management of records.

**Lack of skills and training:** Organisations need to engage personnel who have professional qualifications in records management or archives, to manage their records, and to undertake highly technical processes such as classification, preparing disposition schedules, and system design (ISO 15489-2: 2001). All staff must understand their responsibilities and the rationale behind the authority’s records management system. Thus, they will need basic training and skills in records management to effectively use, maintain and manage the records.

**Limited promotion opportunities for staff:** Limited promotion opportunities in records management units can result in employees wanting to change their careers. It also results in employees who are not happy and not motivated to perform their duties well. Brandman University (2020) pointed out that career advancement is important to today's employees and lack of career growth is one of the most prominent reasons workers leave their jobs.

**Inadequate funds:** Lack of enough funds affects the management of records as funds are needed to source equipment like computers and tools that are needed to enhance the productivity of records management units. Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit (2018) posited that inadequate funding resulted in a deficiency in terms of technical human resources and archival equipment and supplies at the National Archives and Records Centre in Uganda.

**Inadequate staff:** Shortage of staff could lead to poor performance of the organisation. BMAU (2018) discovered that inadequate staff resulted in work overload, stress and slowed down work productivity in a study on the National Archives and Records Centre in Uganda.

**Inadequate facilities for RMU:** This is one of the challenges faced by records management units. A records management unit with an effective records management programme can store and maintain its records securely and efficiently (Norris, 2002). Furthermore, "cost-effective, secure storage systems that provide quick and rapid retrieval will help ensure the ready availability of records in case of litigation and audits, as well as for future reference use" (Norris, 2002, p.3). According to Mauco (2016) records management units need to be given enough resources to manage records properly.

Thus, the literature review revealed numerous challenges encountered by a records management unit: lack of policies in organisations to enforce records management practises; lack of top management support on records management; lack of awareness of the importance of records management; lack of skills and training amongst records management practitioners in organisations; records management units reporting to senior managers who do not have an idea about the function, limited promotional aspects, inadequate funds, staff and facilities for RMUs.

## **Methodology:**

The primary data to determine the challenges was gathered using a self-administered questionnaire followed by a semi-structured face-to-face interview. The total population of the study was 73 comprising 51 internal customers (action officers), 5 RMU officers, and 17 external customers. However, the question on challenges faced by RMU was posed only to five RMU officers because they are the only ones responsible for the BEC RMU.

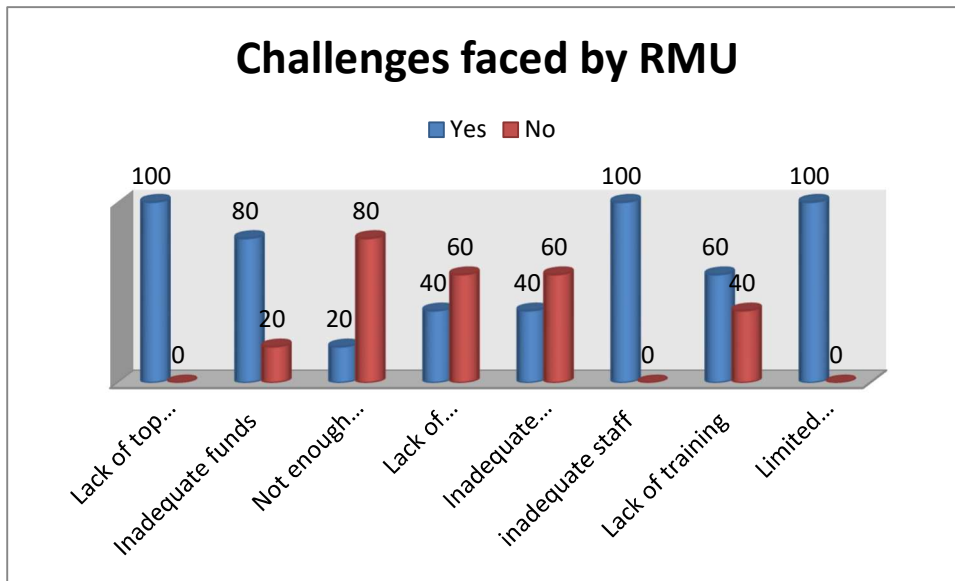
Questionnaires were self – administered and distributed both by mail and hand delivery depending on individual preference. This study used closed-ended questionnaires and questions were structured. Questionnaires were used because their management was relatively simple. The respondents were given three working days to complete the questionnaires even though most of them ended up taking more than the given time because they complained that the questionnaire was too long and that they were busy. In semi-structured interview the researcher and respondents engage in a formal interview (Kabir, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allow informants the freedom to express their views in their terms hence, providing reliable and comparable qualitative data. Interview meetings were scheduled according to the respondents' convenience and availability and the researcher met two people in a day. The responses were led and documented by the researcher.

## **Findings**

### ***Challenges faced by RMU***

Determining challenges was one of the objectives of the study and they were addressed by five records officers. Records Officers were asked to state the challenges they face in their effort to provide quality customer service in the RMU. The results are summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** Challenges faced by RMU



Source: Field data

As evident from the above Figure 1, the study revealed the following challenges:

- a) Lack of top management support: 5(100%) participants revealed that lack of top management support hinders them from providing quality service.
- b) Inadequate funds: 4 (80%) participants said that inadequate funds hinder them from providing quality service while 1 (20%) said it is not a challenge.
- c) Not enough storage space: 4 (80%) participants said that it is not a challenge while 1 (20%) said it is a challenge. Observation by the researcher indicated that storage space is not a challenge since the RMU has enough storage cabinets.
- d) Lack of cooperation from customers: 3 (60%) participants said this is not a challenge whereas 2 (40%) viewed it as a challenge.
- e) Inadequate facilities in the RMU: 3 (60%) participants said that this is not a challenge while only 2 (40%) felt it is a challenge.
- f) Inadequate staff: 5 (100%) participants viewed this as a challenge in providing quality customer service.
- g) Lack of training: 3 (60%) participants indicated that lack of training hinders them from providing quality customer service while 2 (40%) said that it does not.



h) Limited promotion opportunities for staff : 5 (100%) participants confirmed that limited promotional aspects are a challenge.

### **Discussion**

The study established that the BEC RMU staff are faced with major challenges including lack of top management support, inadequate funds, inadequate staff, lack of training, and limited promotion opportunities for staff. Lack of cooperation from customers and inadequate facilities in the RMU was revealed as some of the minor challenges. Not enough storage space was exposed as a challenge by 4 (80%) of the participants, but upon the observation by the researcher, it was not found as a challenge. Similarly, a study by Mohammed et al. (2018) revealed that there were numerous challenges faced by Sunyani Technical University in Ghana. The challenges included improper records management; inadequate proper security for records; inadequate professionally trained records managers; inadequate resources to facilitate proper records management practices in the institution; and, insufficient space for records management. Other challenges were identified as: misplacement and loss of vital records in the institution; inadequate computer terminals; lack of record keeping policy; lack of record retention; lack of disposition schedule in the institution; and, ineffective means of retrieving record (Mohammed et al., 2018). This section discusses the major challenges identified by the study:

**Lack of skilled staff and top management support:** This study established that there was lack of top management support to RMU as 5 (100%) participants revealed that lack of top management support hinders them from providing quality service. The findings of this study confirmed what Keakopa (2013) established when a records management strategy was being introduced at Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS). The author revealed that the organisation was struggling due to a lack of skilled staff and untimely responses from top management. According to Norris (2002), records management staff must have the right skills and experience, and be given enough resources to manage records properly. Fournier (2020) is of the view that the concern with a workforce skills shortage is something that is worrying organisations all over the world. The author further pointed out that organizations that are not able to fill positions with skilled workers are stretched with resources that result in damaging the reputation of the organisations. Lack of top management support is a matter of concern in all types of organisations. Support from top management promotes team spirit and motivates employees. Lack of top management support affects the relationship between management and other employees. Relations between top management and employees is said to have a significant effect on productivity as “bad relations often lead to violations of psychological contracts, low levels of fulfillment of perceived promises

and commitments made by the organization (Karama, 2019 p.314). Hence, skilled staff and top management support are vital.

**Inadequate funds:** The findings of this study revealed that BEC RMU was confronted with inadequate funds, which was confirmed by 4 (80%) of participants who pointed out that inadequate funds hinders them from providing quality service. This was in line with Wadesango et al.(2018) in their study to ascertain the causes of poor service delivery and to establish if outsourcing of public service delivery could be used to improve local Authority services. It emerged in their study that lack of funds was one of the main causes of poor service delivery in local authorities. They further argued that inadequate funds makes service delivery problematic. Inadequate funds leads to limited resources which results in service providers compromising their service quality.

**Inadequate staff:** This study found that inadequate staff was a challenge faced by BEC RMU. This was confirmed by 5 (100%) participants who viewed it as a challenge in providing quality service. BMAU (2018) pointed out that inadequate staff can result in work overload, stress and slow down work productivity.

**Lack of training:** It was revealed in this study that lack of training is one of the challenges that hinders service delivery. Three (60%) of the participants attested that lack of training hindered them from providing quality customer service. According to Rounds and Kussmann (2012), one of the crucial ways to promote a strong but flexible records management programme is to ensure that staff who are responsible for records management projects have suitable skills for their levels of responsibility. The staff should be motivated, available and willing to help customers at all times. They should also have a neat and professional appearance. It is essential that all staff understand their responsibilities and the rationale behind the authority's records management. Thus the staff need basic training in records management and customer satisfaction in order to effectively use, maintain and manage records. The findings of this study concurred with Mauco (2016), who also revealed that most government organisations in Botswana lacked skilled or trained staff. The findings of this study also confirmed what was highlighted by Mampe and Kalusopa (2012) who posited that challenges faced by the Department of Corporate Services in the Ministry of Health in Botswana included; lack of awareness and existence of the records management policy, delays in access and use of records; low levels of skill and training opportunities in records management. This means that the findings of this study were consistent with previous studies in Botswana and other countries in the region.

**Limited promotion opportunities for staff:** This was one of the challenges identified in the study. All 5 (100%) participants indicated that limited promotion opportunities for staff hindered them in quality service delivery. Staff should be given more

opportunity for promotions so as to motivate them and motivated staff will serve customers better. According to Sibonde et al. (2021) employee motivation positively correlates with service quality. Promoting employees gives them a feeling of satisfaction which will ultimately improve customer satisfaction in organisations.

### **Conclusion:**

The study established that the RMU faces some challenges including: lack of top management support, inadequate funds, inadequate staff, lack of training and limited promotion opportunities for staff that compromises service delivery and hence affecting customer satisfaction at BEC RMU.

The limitation of this paper is that the questionnaire and interviews on challenges faced by BEC RMU was confined only to five records officers. However, it was important to establish the challenges for the improvement of the service delivery of the RMU.

**Recommendations:** Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered to overcome the identified challenges at BEC RMU:

#### **Recommendation 1: Top management support**

This study revealed that the Records officers were not satisfied with the support they get from top management. It is therefore recommended that the top management should provide all the necessary support that the RMU needs for excellent service delivery to customers. The management also needs to be sensitized on the importance of records management in good service delivery.

#### ***Recommendation 2: Adequate funding and staffing***

Inadequate funding and staffing were identified as challenges in the study, hence, it is recommended that the BEC RMU officers should come up with a sufficient budget and a priority list so that they can focus at one initiative at a time. They should set goals and work to accomplish the set goals according to the priority list. To address the issue of inadequate staff, the organisation may seek to sponsor interested candidates to go for training on records management and customer service.

#### **Recommendation 3: Training of RMU officers**

There is need to train RMU officers in customer care and handling of customer complaints since the study revealed that some of them were not trained in the area and this was also identified as one of the challenges. Lack of training may results in lack of knowledge which may compromise customer satisfaction. In addition, the study recommends that the organisation should keep on taking the RMU officers for refresher

courses on good customer care. Incentives can be set to encourage officers to go for further personal development.

#### **Recommendation 4: Opportunities for staff promotion**

This study revealed that limited promotion opportunities for staff was one of the challenges faced by BEC RMU. The study therefore recommends that the RMU officers should be given more opportunities for promotions in order to enhance service delivery. It should be made clear to the RMU officers of what they need to do in order to advance.

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