

# IMPROVING THE MANAGEMENT OF ESTATE AGENTS' RECORDS IN BULAWAYO, ZIMBABWE

**Sibusiso Ncube**

University of South Africa  
sibusisoericncube@gmail.com

**Antonio Rodrigues**

University of South Africa  
trodrigu@unisa.ac.za

## ABSTRACT

This article reports on the state of estate agents' records in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, with a view to recommending improvements toward their effective and efficient management. Within the qualitative paradigm, the researchers adopted a collective case study strategy. The main population for the study was the estate agencies in the city, and the selection of the respondents was based on a purposive sampling technique. In this regard, the person who occupied the overall management position of each estate agency was considered the most suitable respondent. Interviews were held with these estate agents to gather in-depth information. It became evident from the empirical findings of the study that the recordkeeping practices of the estate agents were performed inadequately, including: inadequate storage facilities for their records; haphazard filing and ad hoc records management practices; an absence of records management procedure manuals for both paper records and electronic records; random disposal practices and non-existent disposal and retention schedules; and a lack of archives and records management training for estate agency staff. In addition, legislation was found to be weak and inadequate regarding its coverage of the management of records of non-public organisations, such as estate agencies. Based on these findings, it was recommended that estate agents develop and implement records management programmes which will ensure that their records management practices are more effective. Further recommendations were made to improve on the storage, classification and filing, disposal and disaster preparedness, and also for all estate agents to collaborate with archivers and records professionals and institutions in order to receive the necessary advice and assistance on different record management issues.

**Keywords:** records; records management; recordkeeping; Bulawayo, Zimbabwe; private sector; estate agents; estate agents' records

## INTRODUCTION

Proper records management ensures the systematic control of the creation, maintenance, use and disposition of organisational records. However, operating in a climate characterised by economic hardships, estate agents' records management in Zimbabwe – including in Bulawayo – has been reduced to the periphery and deemed not cost effective. Authors, such as Mazikana (1996), Dube, Mukono and David (2013), Matangira (2014) and Dewah (2016), lament that records management has not been a strong point in the private sector in Zimbabwe and posit that very few practitioners in the private sector, including estate agents in Bulawayo, have received records management training other than the cursory treatment that it receives in secretarial and office management training workshops. Therefore, the standard of records management in the majority of these businesses is often poor and little attempt has been made to mobilise resources for its improvement.

Furthermore, many scholars, such as Matangira (2014), Mnjama (2003), Ngoepe (2009, 2012) and Ngulube and Tafor (2006), have expressed disappointment about the state of records management in sub-Saharan Africa in general, including Zimbabwe, as they revealed that many records offices operate as records warehouses instead of records management offices where records are systematically controlled from creation to their final disposition. Professional Records and Information Services Management (PRISM 2015) points out, though, that “in today’s corporate volatile environment, records management is simply not optional”. It is imperative that the management of all organisational records, including those of estate agents, is effective and efficient so as to ensure proper decision-making, good governance and productivity.

Chibambo (2003, 9) attests to the significance of records management in organisations such as estate agencies, noting that the purpose of a record is to provide information and evidence used to make decisions, take actions, or demonstrate accountability. Barata, Cain and Thurston (2000, 2) further allude that legal matters, such as land and property registration, depend on the availability of records. Moreover, records protect rights, privileges and individuals by establishing citizenship, eligibility for benefits, and ownership of property. Records management in estate agencies offers a variety of asset-management benefits such as protection (e.g. of privacy, data ownership, intellectual property); monitoring (e.g. auditing, due diligence, compliance); maintenance (e.g. storage, preservation, and retention); and documenting (e.g. past decisions and actions) (PRISM 2015).

The World Bank (2005) identifies the symptoms of a collapsed recordkeeping system. These may include a lack of awareness of the role of records management in supporting organisational efficiency and accountability; an absence of legislation to enable modern records management practice; overcrowded and unsuitable storage of paper and electronic records; an absence of purpose-built records centres; a deficient budget for records management; poor security and confidential controls; an absence of a vital records management programme, disaster recovery and preparedness plans;

and limited capacity to manage electronic records. It is therefore important to ensure that estate agents' records are managed properly to avoid a total collapse of the whole recordkeeping system, which in turn would negatively affect the activities of these organisations. Records are the lifeblood of any organisation and estate agencies in this particular case. Summarily, sound records management practice improves decision making, fosters professionalism, acts as evidence in litigation or audit cases and enables estate agents to assimilate new technologies. In addition, failure to keep records effectively may be costly for estate agents as they may spend added time and effort retrieving records. Implementing proper recordkeeping procedures will also enable estate agents to function and achieve their objectives, as every activity will be done according to set written standards and targets (NAS 2005).

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many previous European colonies in Africa, such as Zimbabwe, have collapsed records management systems. The reason is often mismanagement and informal practices supplanting formal rules, causing the formal ways of working to gradually collapse and be replaced by ad hoc work methods (IRMT 2000, 7). The situation is no different in Bulawayo's estate agencies. Preliminary investigations conducted by the researcher in Bulawayo suggested that estate agents are left to manage their records in a disorganised and unsystematic manner. This has been further exacerbated by the tough economic climate in the city, which has shifted recordkeeping to the periphery of private businesses. There also seems to be no national legislation that might support estate agents' recordkeeping. This is further complicated by the fact that the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) Act (1986) does not mandate NAZ as an archival authority in the country to inspect records and archival practices in the private sector (Dube 2011, 10). This gap left by the NAZ Act may lead to estate agents managing their records in an uncontrolled manner, where records are haphazardly managed, and where decisions end up being made on an ad hoc basis without reference being made to existing records.

## PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH ARTICLE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the above problem, the purpose of the article is to report on how records of estate agents in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, are currently managed with a view to recommending improvements to their effective and efficient management going forward. Thus, the article deals with the following research questions:

1. What are the prevailing records management practices carried out by the estate agents in Bulawayo?
2. What records management training does the estate agencies staff receive?

3. What are the legal and policy provisions that guide the management of estate agents' records?

## METHODOLOGY

The article is based on a master's study which sought to investigate how records of estate agents in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, are managed with a view to recommending improvements to their effective and efficient management. Choosing an appropriate methodology for the study was very important as it determined how the whole research process was going to be carried out. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology. Tewksbury (2009, 42) explains that qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things. The study was interested in the opinions and views of the estate agents towards their records and their records management activities, hence qualitative research was the best methodology for obtaining such information. Creswell (2003) also identifies strategies for inquiry in qualitative research which include ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological and narrative research. This research identified a collective case study to be the most appropriate strategy, as the researcher studied a group of cases. The main population for the study was the 12 Bulawayo estate agents identified in the 2015 Zimbabwe Business Directory. Of the 12 estate agents, seven agreed to participate in the study. The estate agents were given an identity code to guarantee anonymity, as was assured to the participants following their request prior to collecting data from them, during the consent stage. As for the sampling technique used to select the respondents within these organisations, the researcher deliberately chose information-rich individuals, that is, those who were most likely to provide the relevant data required. Hence, the selection of the respondents for the study was based on a purposive sampling technique. In this regard, the person who occupied the overall management position of each organisation, that is, the director or manager of each organisation, was considered the most suitable respondent. This is because of their direct involvement in the overall decision-making processes of these organisations, including decisions on the eventual disposal and fate of the records created by them. Semi-structured interviews were held with the estate agents to gather in-depth information. In addition, observations were also made on-site by the researcher. An observation log was kept to record the observations made.

## INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to Singh (2015), data interpretation can be defined as the device through which the factors which seem to explain what has been observed by the researcher in

the course of the study can be better understood. The interpretation and discussion of the data are presented below according to the research questions outlined above.

## PREVAILING RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES CARRIED OUT AT ESTATE AGENCIES IN BULAWAYO

Gold (1995, 1 in Chinyemba and Ngulube 2005, n.p.) describes an organisation's management of its records as the "corporate ... secret weapon" and "the winning strategy" that give the organisation the competitive edge. Some organisations pay attention to the management of this corporate resource whilst others do not.

The findings from the interviews revealed that various types of records were being created in estate agencies as a result of their activities. Although electronic records were being generated, most of the records were still paper based. The ongoing creation of paper records is acknowledged by researchers such as Mnjama (2003) and Abioye (2014) in their studies on records management in different institutions who noted a phenomenal increase in the use of paper despite the growth of information technology. The researcher also observed that the records were being kept within the estate agencies' buildings. This included semi-active and non-active files, which were also being stored within different offices in estate agencies.

The data collected indicated that two estate agents rated their records management practices as excellent, three estate agents rated them as very good and two rated them as good. However, the researcher's onsite observations and interview conversations did not match. The researcher found that there were inadequate storage facilities for the records of all the estate agents; haphazard and ad hoc filing practices; an absence of records management procedure manuals for both paper records and electronic records; random disposal practices and non-existent disposal and retention schedules; and a lack of archives and records management training for estate agents staff – which are all clear sign that records management was being carried out poorly.

Moreover, estate agents were also asked whether they agreed with the statement: "Records management is an asset in your organisation". Two estate agents agreed with the statement, whilst five estate agents strongly agreed. Although the estate agents agreed that records are an asset to their organisations, four of these participants said that they did not have any future plans to train their staff in records management, nor change their filing practices, or introduce procedure manuals and retention schedules. This is further evidence that although estate agents claimed that records management is important, they were yet to truly fully recognise it as an indispensable corporate asset.

## RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE MANUALS

Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005, n.p.) explain that a records management procedure manual establishes the various phases of the records management programme, assists with training of employees, saves money, reduces errors, standardises procedures,

increases productivity and makes provision for change. Procedure manuals also foster professionalism as they spell out how the records are kept from creation to destruction or preservation. In this study, only one estate agent had written down procedures. The other estate agents revealed that they did not have any sort of procedure manuals. Abioye (2014, 34) laments the lack of procedure manuals and guidelines in many organisations, arguing that their absence negatively affects records accumulation, storage, maintenance and use by the institutions. The author argues that in this regard, a manual serves as a reference point for records management staff and ensures the standardisation of procedures.

## MANAGEMENT OF ELECTRONIC RECORDS IN ESTATE AGENCIES

Electronic records in the estate agencies included emails, Microsoft Word and Excel documents, and official communication from stakeholders such as banks, tenants, landlords and others. This study established that all seven estate agents generated electronic records. The main type of electronic record mentioned by these estate agents was email. The estate agents further explained that they often communicated via email with their clients. With the use of technology on the increase, it was expected that estate agents would have adopted the use of email when communicating with clients. For instance, authors such as Chachage and Ngulube (2005) and Dewah (2016), report that most of a firm's knowledge exchange is via email. However, although emails are primary sources of evidence, many organisations do not manage them properly. The problem of managing emails is compounded by the fact that existing email systems have limited capacity to effectively manage messages that organisations may want to keep (Chachage and Ngulube 2005, 10). The ineffective management of emails was also a problem in the estate agencies, where there were no criteria for determining the importance of emails and staff used their own discretion to destroy these records.

Guidelines for transferring electronic records are generally non-existent in many organisations in Africa (Maseh 2016; Ngulube 2004). Similarly, the study findings revealed that when disposing of their electronic records, the Bulawayo estate agents simply deleted them from their computers. There were no guidelines or retention schedules for time periods that these records should be kept. Consequently, most electronic records were not being preserved into the future. In the same way, Ngulube (2004) in his study observes that organisations have a fragmented approach to managing electronic records and further observes that agencies are largely concerned with immediate-term "processibility" of these records rather than their long-term preservation and use (Ngulube 2004, 27). The author further asserts that there is a minimal number of organisations in Africa that have instituted formal programmes to manage their electronic records. Moreover, there is the reality that staff members are far more familiar with the skills, competencies and experiences needed within the

paper environment. Many thus feel ill-equipped to deal with and are overawed by the electronic revolution, particularly given the speed at which it is occurring (Maseh 2016, 89–90). These remarks were also observed in the estate agencies in Bulawayo as staff lacked effective training to do electronic records management and electronic records were being disposed of unsystematically.

The researcher further observed that only two estate agents were using proper electronic records management software and/or estate agents' records management software to facilitate the management of their electronic records. The other estate agents used common software such as Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook. As a consequence, electronic records were largely being managed without proper electronic records management software and property management software, hence compromising the management of these records.

## RECORDS STORAGE IN ESTATE AGENCIES

The results revealed that in six estate agencies there were no records management departments, sections or registries to control and maintain records, except for one estate agent which revealed that it had a small records section. The researcher observed that records in estate agencies were stored in departmental offices and storerooms without adequate facilities. Some records were piled in the reception area, a clear sign that there were no adequate storage conditions. Similar conditions were observed by Mnjama and Wamukoya (2004, 36) who lamented that if “you visit any of the offices in Africa and Zimbabwe particularly, you will discover closed files stored on top of filing cabinets, basements, corridors and garages”.

In certain countries, such as the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada, there are set standards pertaining to how estate agent records should be stored. For instance, the Estate Agent Recordkeeping Regulations in the UK (2009, 2) outline that permanent paper-based records shall be kept in a suitable environment which includes appropriate temperature and relative humidity control, and so on. In the case of records kept in electronic form, these should be able to be readily produced, at the place relevant to where the business transaction or proposed transaction is taking place. Similarly, the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada (FINTRAC 2014) emphasises that estate agents' records be kept in such a way that they can be readily identified and retrieved when a request is made to examine them. In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA 2014) expects that records be available for retrieval in the original form or copied by a ZIMRA officer as may be required; and where these records are kept on computer, the officer should have access to these records for inspection and/or retrieval from such computer-related gadgets or media.

However, most organisations, including the estate agents investigated, were failing to comply with these basic standards for storing records. The researcher observed that there were no specific offices/rooms or facilities which met basic archival conditions for the storage of records in the estate agencies, as they were stored in different

departmental offices with no concern for elements such as temperature, humidity, and so on. Such storage conditions exposed the records to harsh environmental elements. In his study, Abioye (2014, 36) also noted that the storage of the records is often not regulated in terms of temperature and relative humidity control. Storage conditions offer many opportunities to prolong the lifespan of documents because they contribute to the physical condition of the documents. However, the situation is steadily growing worse as the infrastructure in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Zimbabwe, are disintegrating (Chaterera, Ngulube and Rodrigues 2014; Mazikana 1996; Ngulube 2007).

## FILING AND FINDING AIDS IN ESTATE AGENCIES

Abioye (2014, 34) notes that a good filing or classification system and a well-designed finding aid are essential for ensuring easy retrieval of records. Hlophe and Wamukoya (2007, 65) agree, stating that a number of studies identified the following as obstacles that hindered access to and optimum utilisation of records: poor filing systems and inadequate finding aids.

Although all the estate agents in Bulawayo reported that their retrieval was good, only two estate agents had a properly documented classification system. The remaining estate agents use basic alphabetical, alphanumerical and subject filing systems. Furthermore, the same two estate agents indicated that they also have a basic finding aid to help with the retrieval of their records, although they did not indicate exactly what type of finding aids these were. Without finding aids, it is more likely that retrieval will be poor and hence access to records may be hindered in such circumstances. Researchers also highlight that the absence of finding aids is one of the indicators that access to records is limited or not even possible (Hlophe and Wamukoya 2007, 65; Ngulube 2004, 29).

## DISPOSAL AND RETENTION OF RECORDS

The findings revealed that all the estate agents were engaged in random disposal practices and that there was an absence of disposal and retention schedules. In addition, the data revealed that six out of seven estate agents kept non-current records on-site, together with their current records. Only one estate agent said that he or she kept his or her non-current records in its own separate in-house archives. Moreover, the estate agents did not have adequate archival facilities, as most semi-current and non-current records were stored in departmental offices. This observation concurs with the study by Chachage and Ngulube (2006, 12) on business records in Tanzania, which revealed that only one company transferred inactive records to some kind of on-site or off-site archive.



## DISPOSAL ACTION WITH REGARD TO PAPER RECORDS

It is through proper records disposal processes that records of permanent value are retained and transferred to archives while those that have no value for permanent preservation are eliminated or disposed of in any other way, mandated by a governing records schedule (Abioye 2014, 35).

While most estate agents shredded their unwanted records and one got rid of them through the National Waste Paper Collection, the results confirmed that there was no established method of disposing records. These findings also showed that estate agents did not have any guidelines for the disposal of their records. The implication is that records are destroyed without any laid-down, written guidelines or any consideration as to the secondary value of such records (Abioye 2014, 35). In addition, as noted above, current records were not being separated from semi-current records. Similarly, in her study on records surveys and management of public records in Zimbabwe, Chaterera (2013, 81) observes that most public registries were congested with semi-active and inactive records, most of which were kept on the floor and in corridors.

There are varying retention periods in estate agencies, depending on the country and the nature of the records. For example, in Alberta, Canada, the Real Estate Act s.25 (Legislation and Information Bulletins, 2009) requires that records be kept for a minimum of three years after they come into existence, while in South Africa, Matheza (2009) reports that estate agents' records must be stored for five years, and be easily accessible. In the UK, according to Consumer Affairs Victoria (2014, 1), the Estate Agents Act of 1980 requires certain agency documents to be kept for future reference. The period varies depending on the type of document.

In Zimbabwe, ZIMRA (2014) stipulates that organisations should keep their records for at least six years. However, the results of this study revealed that three estate agents stored certain records for ten years, two estate agents kept some for seven years, and two estate agents preserved their records for five years. This means that the other three estate agents were not following the basic ZIMRA requirements. Furthermore, even in the case of those agents who did keep certain records for more than six years, these were often retained by chance, without any systematic appraisal criteria.

## DISPOSAL ACTION WITH REGARD TO ELECTRONIC RECORDS

The findings from the estate agents showed that although records in the estate agencies were being archived and stored in back-up files and databases, they were often deleted haphazardly, with records being deleted without reference to any retention schedules. In addition, there were no systematic criteria for the disposal of electronic records. These findings were expressed by the majority of the respondents (six out of the seven) – these estate agents stated that they just deleted these records if they felt that they were not

relevant, without following any guidelines. Ngulube (2004, 27) echoes these sentiments in his study deploring the fact that electronic records are not being preserved for the future. If estate agents continue to destroy electronic records without formal guidelines, they risk losing important information which might be needed in the future.

## DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN ESTATE AGENCIES

Ngulube (2004, 30) argues that records managers should physically defend records and archives, that is, they should be protected from disasters. In the current study, three estate agents had drawn up rudimentary disaster preparedness plans. The other four estate agents did not have any disaster plans. Moreover, the researcher observed that estate agents did not have proper storage conditions and records were stored in various departmental offices and storerooms. Other than exposing the records to harsh environmental conditions, this shortage of space also exposes the records to disasters.

The researcher observed that only three estate agents had secure buildings for their records. These buildings had fire alarms and escape routes should fires break out. The other estate agents' buildings were not secure – further leaving their records exposed to various perils. For instance, one estate agent was located near a welding company. This meant that the records were exposed to fires. Mazikana (1996) and Ngulube (2007, 37) further deplore the disintegration of infrastructure in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with air conditioners and conservation and reprographic equipment having become non-functional. This is also the case with estate agents in Bulawayo where buildings have deteriorated, exposing the records to harsh environmental conditions. The situation has been further hampered by the harsh economic conditions which have left estate agents failing to prioritise the maintenance of their buildings, thereby putting the security of their records at the risk of disasters.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ESTATE AGENTS AND NAZ AND OTHER ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT SERVICES

National archival institutions are mandated to keep records of national interest including those from private organisations, or at least offer archives and records management advice to these organisations. For instance, according to the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act (No. 43 of 1996), the National Archives service is mandated to consider the acquisition of private records, especially if the organisation that created them does not have the means to preserve them. In turn, the National Archives of Scotland (NAS 2005) is regularly asked for advice on records management by all sorts of bodies. However, the current study revealed that estate agents in Bulawayo had no relationship with NAZ, and none of them had either sought or received any records management assistance from NAZ. It was also found that the estate agents were

unaware of any possible external archival services that may be offered. In one case, the managing director of estate agents revealed that they had never even heard of the NAZ.

Dube (2011) also observes that the main problem facing NAZ is its reliance on archaic systems and processes of which the capacity has been outgrown by the records and archives management demands of the modern era. Therefore, the poor services provided by NAZ have moved organisations to terminate their relationship with NAZ. This may be one of the reasons why estate agents have never attempted to seek advice from NAZ concerning their records. Moreover, NAZ is incapacitated to serve even government organisations which it was designed to serve. Hence, if NAZ is failing to provide services to the government, it further becomes difficult for such services to be extended to privately owned organisations such as estate agents. In Zimbabwe, the situation has been made even worse by the dwindling budgets making it difficult for NAZ to focus on even basic management and preservation of archival records (Chaterera 2016; Kemoni and Ngulube 2007).

## RELATIONSHIP WITH A COMMERCIAL RECORDS CENTRE

Dube, Mukono and David (2013 108) comment that the emergence of commercial records centres as professional records management institutions was necessitated by the information explosion which characterised the 20th century and is still prevalent in the 21st century. However, none of the seven estate agents had a relationship with a commercial archival institution. One estate agent felt that information is private and must not be handled by anyone outside their organisation. Another estate agent said that they did not have money to pay for commercial records centres, while two estate agents expressed that they did not have the need for commercial records centres.

In his survey of records management in the private sector, Mazikana (1996, 149) noted that in a few African countries, such as Zimbabwe and South Africa, commercial records centres have been established. In Zimbabwe, for instance, a commercial records centre called Archive-It was established in 2002 with the purpose of providing records storage and management facilities to corporate companies (Dube, Mukono and David 2013, 106). However, the study by these authors revealed that the Archive-It records centre was being poorly marketed. The company mainly relied on sales representatives for their marketing. In today's world where most companies have adopted the use of the internet, it is clear that Archive-It is yet to maximise the use of electronic media for marketing purposes. The poor marketing strategies employed by the company might be one of the reasons why estate agents were not aware of the company. Moreover, the company's clients were mainly from sectors such as health, banking, hospitals, retail and manufacturing, construction, telecommunications, mining and education (Dube, Mukono and David 2013, 106). It also transpired that the estate agents were not sure about the state of the storage facilities of said records company. These commercial

records centres also charge a fee for taking care of the records. In the prevailing economic conditions in Zimbabwe, it was difficult for estate agents to pay for such services when records management is often not their priority.

## PROFESSIONAL SKILLS, INCLUDING RECORDS MANAGEMENT FOR ESTATE AGENTS

Roper and Millar (1999, 54) note that in small agencies, it may not always be possible to have a dedicated records manager with appropriate training and management skills. This is the case with the estate agencies under study, as they had different personnel managing their records, for instance; the accountant; receptionist; managing director; office manager and filing clerk were identified as the ones managing the records in estate agencies in Bulawayo. The office manager, receptionist and filing clerk were the ones most relevant for managing records. Moreover, all the mentioned staff members responsible for managing records also had other duties within their estate agencies. This lack of dedicated records management staff meant that the records were not given much attention. This situation also contributes to the records management challenges discussed earlier, such as a lack of systematic filing systems and finding aids, amongst others.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT TRAINING

Basic records management skills are necessary for estate agents so that they are able to manage their records properly. As far as records management training was concerned, five estate agents agreed that records management training was necessary whilst two estate agents disagreed. Kachala (2002 in Mzerah 2013, 109) argues that there is a need for the provision of appropriate training for staff so as to attain and upgrade their skills. Most of the staff in Bulawayo's estate agencies who were responsible for records management received their training on the job. However, on-the-job training in the researcher's opinion was inappropriate as there was no one in the selected estate agencies with the requisite records management skills and knowledge to train staff.

Although all the respondents from the estate agents had different qualifications (one had a master's degree, two had degrees, three had diplomas and one had a certificate), none of these were in the archives and records management fields. The respondents did not have the necessary knowledge in records management as they failed to answer basic questions on records management. For instance, all the respondents admitted that they often destroyed both electronic and paper records without following proper guidelines.

## LEGISLATION AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN ESTATE AGENTS

As far as records management legislation is concerned, the International Records Management Trust (IRMT 2000) recommends the following:

1. Records must be precisely defined so that legislation covers records in all media and formats and incorporates records created or received at all levels within all parts of the organisation. In the private sector this includes all subordinates or associated agencies or operations.
2. A framework must be established for the continuous appraisal and appropriate disposal of all the records of an organisation.
3. Rules must be set out for the orderly and timely transfer of semi-current records of continuing value to a records centre and of records of permanent value to an archiving repository.

In Zimbabwe, the following Acts were identified as being the most relevant for the management of records in estate agents:

- Estate Agents Act (No. 6 of 1999) [Chapter 27:06];
- Valuers Act (No. 5 of 1996) [Chapter 27:18];
- Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Act (No. 4 of 2013) [Chapter 9:24].

However, it was revealed that the above-mentioned legislative requirements for basic records management are not being met. Five estate agents agreed that they were aware of these acts but did not consistently adhere to the sections of the Acts that govern records management activities, while two estate agents did not use any Act. The absence of adherence to legislation by these estate agents explains in part their poor records management practices, as keeping records is a legal issue as well. Analysis of the above Acts also revealed that the Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Act [Chapter 9:24] does outline basic records management requirements as it states that documents should be kept for five years. However, only one estate agent was using this Act in part, although the director explained that all estate agents are compelled by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe to use the Act.

The Estate Agents Act [Chapter 27:06] also outlines that a person who has opened a trust account shall keep proper books of accounts and other records in relation. However, these Acts do not have a distinct section which outlines how records should be kept from creation and how they should be destroyed, which also contributed to the estate agents not managing their records effectively. An analysis of the Estate Agents Act [Chapter 27:06] further revealed that the Act does not state the retention schedules for the different records kept.

When asked if records management issues were adequately dealt with by these pieces of legislation, the five estate agents who were aware of the acts responded that they were not. Such findings reveal that there are no detailed procedures on records management in the relevant legislation. Hence, Acts that impact on estate agents need to be updated to take into account records management issues.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions for the study are presented according to the research questions outlined above.

## ESTATE AGENTS' RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

As shown in the discussion, estate agents produced many different records. The researcher observed that most of the records created were being used for administrative day-to-day transactions. This means that these records had primary value which supported the administration and fiscal functions of organisations. These records also had secondary value as they served evidential, informational and historical purposes (Webster, Hare and McLeod 1999). The implications of keeping records for current use are that estate agents were able to make current decisions based on their records. However, as no systematic attempt is being made by the majority of the estate agents to preserve these records in the long term, they were unable to provide continuing information for future reference, such as evidence in litigation and in audit cases.

Despite the appreciation of recordkeeping that was expressed by the participants, the study established that most organisations kept their records in their working office space, in conditions that were not appropriate for holding current records or preserving records in the long term. The implications in the estate agencies are that records are being kept longer than necessary in much needed working space, incurring unnecessary costs. It was also concluded that the majority of the estate agents did not have procedure manuals that could guide them in their records management practices. The implications of not having procedure manuals meant that estate agents were unable to verify the necessary phases of their records management processes and that they were unable to standardise their procedures. Records management procedure manuals act as guidelines, or as Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005, n.p.) observe, "a records management manual serves as a reference point for records management staff and ensures the standardisation of procedures".

Furthermore, the study established that although all the estate agents generated electronic records, these electronic records were not being preserved into the future as they were deleted on an ad hoc basis due to the absence of procedure manuals. The consequence of not having proper electronic records management procedures meant

that their electronically generated information was also not being effectively preserved into the future. Ngulube (2004) observes that organisations often have a fragmented approach to managing electronic records. Moreover, Chachage and Ngulube (2006, 10) note that the problem of managing electronic records, such as emails, is compounded by the fact that existing email systems have limited capacity to effectively manage messages that organisations may want to keep.

The researcher also concluded that there were storage challenges as it was observed that records were stored in the reception area and in different departmental offices. This finding showed that space was inadequate. Moreover, non-current records were stored in the departmental offices as well. The repercussions are that the storage conditions at estate agencies expose the records to harsh environmental conditions such as unsuitable temperature and humidity controls. Ngulube (2007, 42) adds that storage conditions offer many opportunities to prolong the lifespan of documents because they contribute to the physical condition of these documents. It was also found that there were no proper filing systems and no proper finding aids. The implications of poor records filing and the absence of finding aids meant that records were being filed in an ad hoc manner and that records retrieval was being hampered. Abioye (2014, 34) emphasises the financial implications of misfiled records, which may lead to extra resources being needed to locate important and urgent information. Hence, estate agents were also losing a lot of money due to the misfiling of their records. In addition, it was concluded that estate agents did not have any systematic disposal/retention schedules. The failure to maintain retention and disposal schedules has disastrous effects. As a result of a lack of retention and disposal schedules, these organisations are failing to ensure the preservation of essential records. At the same time, they are failing to destroy business records which are no longer needed. The implications are that space is not being effectively used as records which would have been destroyed are still being kept. This is confirmed by Mzerah (2013) who noted that “not all records in an organisation are of long term value and some records are only useful for a limited time after which they can be disposed of”.

It was also concluded that the majority of the estate agents were at risk of being affected by disasters. As observed by Okello-Obura and Ssekitto (2011, 141), many institutions around the world and in Zimbabwe conduct their business as though they will never experience a disaster. The implications of not having a disaster preparedness plan are that the estate agents are left vulnerable to disasters, and unable to recover should a disaster strike. In addition, a lot of revenue may be lost in trying to start up their business again.

It was also found that estate agents did not have a relationship with NAZ or with any other archives and records management services. The implications for collaborations between the private sector, such as estate agents, and NAZ are that they can share information and estate agents can ask for recordkeeping advice from NAZ. Dube (2011) affirms that the NAZ Act (1986) does not mandate NAZ as an archival authority in the country to inspect records and archival practices in the private sector. Hence, legislation also hinders NAZ from extending its services to the private sector. Chigariro (2014,

11) elaborates that NAZ operates in isolation, hence it is in a weak position to effect change or contribute effectively and efficiently to the economic, cultural and social development of the Zimbabwean community. In addition, it was found that the estate agents did not have any relationship with commercial records management companies. Dube, Mukono and David (2013, 106) report that organisations are often not aware of the services provided by commercial records centres – due to financial constraints and poor marketing strategies. The implications are that small organisations, such as estate agencies, are unable to dispose of and transfer their noncurrent records off-site, to a commercial records centre, for instance. Moreover, small organisations – such as estate agencies – may miss on the opportunity to receive expert advice on how to manage their records, from these companies.

## ESTATE AGENTS' PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT TRAINING

It was determined that records at the estate agencies were being managed by personnel who did not receive any training in archives and records management. It was also established that these individuals were responsible for other duties in the organisation, and that their recordkeeping responsibilities were secondary. These findings explain to a large extent the state of the records management practices experienced at these organisations, such as the lack of records management procedure manuals and disposal schedules, inadequate filing systems, and so on, as there were no trained personnel to fulfil these activities. Garaba (2010, 260) believes that education and training are fundamental underpinnings for improving the management of records and archives in Africa.

The study also concluded that most knowledge on records management was acquired on the job as there were hardly any workshops or seminars in this field in Zimbabwe. It can further be derived that on-the-job training was inadequate as there was no qualified personnel to train staff. Naseiku and Kemoni (2011) emphasise that for records to be managed effectively, the staff members who are responsible for records need to receive proper education and training in records management. The implications in such a scenario where there are no qualified records management personnel or staff members with recordkeeping skills are that estate agents will most likely fail to manage their records appropriately, which will ultimately have negative consequences for the day-to-day operations of these organisations and their long-term survival (Katuu 2015).

## LEGAL AND POLICY PROVISION FOR MANAGEMENT OF ESTATE AGENTS' RECORDS

It was observed that three acts impacted most on the management of estate records, namely, the Estate Agents Act 27:06, the Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Act



Chapter 9:24, and the Valuers Act Chapter 27:18. The act that played the biggest role in estate agents' records management was the Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Act, as it presented a basic outline of the time period for which records should be kept. However, most of the estate agents were not adhering to any legislation that could guide estate agents' records management. One of the implications in a situation where estate agents are not adhering to any records management legislation is that they may be liable to prosecution. This is cemented by the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (2014) which warns that failure to keep records as required by the law constitutes an offence for which one may be penalised or even prosecuted.

In addition, estate agents observed that legislation was not specific to records management in estate agencies. Okello-Obura (2011, 2) also reinforces that many developing countries have either weak laws or inactive legislative provisions to promote the management of sound records and archives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the following recommendations in view of the study findings and conclusions. Estate agents should:

- Develop and implement records management programmes which will ensure that their practices with regard to records management are effective. Benefits that can be gained from having an effective records management programme include the control of records creation and growth; improvement of efficiency and productivity; ensuring regulatory compliance; and cost reduction (Chaterera 2016; IRMT 2000).
- Formulate or compile records management procedure manuals which will guide each and every recordkeeping activity – from the creation to the disposal of records. Chaterera (2013, 126) observes that such a manual enables consistency in records management activities.
- Create the appropriate storage spaces for their records. This includes taking into account concerns such as proper temperature and humidity controls, suitable filing equipment, and so forth. Storage facilities should also be thoroughly cleaned and dusted to avoid exposing records to harsh environmental conditions. The records stored at the reception areas and other areas that are not suitable to store records should be moved to suitable storage areas.
- Design and implement classification systems that enable easy retrieval of records. Kalusopa (2011, 275) recommends that organisations should design and implement effective systems for both files and action tracking in paper-based and digital recordkeeping systems, to ensure that adequate audit trails are built into all systems so that a history of access to, and use of, records is maintained.
- Develop retention and disposal schedules for different types of records; both in paper and electronic format. Estate agents are also encouraged to follow these

retention/disposal schedules so that inactive records are not continually kept in offices and taking up much-needed space. Kemoni and Ngulube (2007, 395) agree that systematic appraisal and disposition of records through records retention schedules would lead to enhanced records management practices and effective service delivery.

- Draw up disaster preparedness plans and staff should be trained in disaster management so that they are able to react should a disaster occur. Fire was rated as the most dangerous disaster for estate agencies. Estate agents are encouraged to ensure that their fire extinguishers and fire detection systems are fully functional. Estate agents are also advised to have back-up systems for both their electronic and manual records so that they are able to continue should their records be destroyed by any form of disaster.
- Although NAZ is not mandated to extend its services to private organisations such as estate agencies, it is recommended that the estate agents seek to create an informal working relationship with NAZ in order to obtain basic support and advice regarding archives and records management. It is also recommended that estate agents seek the services of commercial archiving companies such as Archive-It.
- Send their staff members who are involved in recordkeeping, for training in archives and records management. This may include formal qualifications, short courses and/or workshops. In Bulawayo, the Bulawayo Polytechnic offers records management training up to diploma level. These offerings may be convenient for estate agency staff to attain the necessary skills so that records management is improved. In addition, there is a great need for personnel working with electronic records to be trained in electronic recordkeeping (Katuu 2015).
- Consider the acts that impact on the management of their records. For instance, they should adhere to the Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Act Chapter 9:24, which stipulates how long certain records should be kept. This will ensure to a point that records are kept within the confines of the laws in the country. There is also a need for the amendment of the Estate Agents Act to include a section on records management.

## CONCLUSION

It became evident from the findings of the study that the recordkeeping practices of the estate agents in Bulawayo were performed inadequately. These shortcomings included inadequate storage facilities for their records; haphazard filing and ad hoc records management practices; an absence of records management procedure manuals for both paper records and electronic records; random disposal practices and non-existent disposal and retention schedules; and a lack of training in archives and records management for estate agents staff. In addition, legislation was found to be weak and inadequate

regarding its coverage of the management of records of non-public organisations, such as estate agencies.

The World Bank (2005) supports these research findings with the remark that in many countries around the world, recordkeeping systems are unable to cope with the growing mass of unmanaged records. More recently, authors such as Dube (2011), Chaterera (2016) and Maseh (2016) further noted that this is particularly true in countries with limited financial or administrative resources and where managers lack training or professional development opportunities. Zimbabwe's records management situation is in the same dilemma described by the World Bank and these authors – due to the prevailing economic conditions which have resulted in a lack of prioritisation of records management. This situation has also affected estate agents.

Therefore, the article came up with a number of recommendations to confront these problems. However, because these organisations are generally relatively small, and due to their limited capacity, many of the recommendations above should be implemented with the participation and collaboration of archives and records management professionals. This form of support may come from the public sector or from private consultancies and/or non-profit organisations, such as the IRMT. They are often in a better position to give advice and provide assistance on these issues, such as conducting a records audit, implementing a records management programme, practise disaster preparedness, and imparting much-needed archives and records management skills.

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