
Personnel Records Management in Tanzania

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Abstract

Background of the study: Inadequate and improper storage facilities, absence of electronic records management system, inadequate space for records storage, human resource officer's lack of records management skills and lack of internal training were the main challenges affecting the management of personnel records in Liwale district council.

Purpose: The study aimed at investigating the personnel records and the challenges faced in management of these records in Liwale district council (LDC) in Tanzania.

Method: The study used a qualitative approach in which 30 respondents were purposely selected. Questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to collect data. Quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science version 20 while qualitative data were subjected to content analysis.

Findings: Findings revealed that appointment letters and letters of confirmation were the most cited (16.7%) type of personnel records readily available in various departments at Liwale District Council. Others include health and social security records, letter of transfer, notification of termination/death and retirement, medical report, wages and salary slip, and copy of birth certificate.

Conclusion: It is recommended that Liwale district council should address the challenges faced in the management of personnel records for better and fair decision-making.

Keywords: *records management, personnel records management, Tanzania*

Introduction

All organizations, regardless of their function, produce records that memorialize and provide impartial evidence of activities performed, events occurred, results achieved, or statements made (Sanwine, 2020). Through records management, all records and other documents are controlled in their lifecycle from creation, or receipt, maintenance, circulation, organization, storage and retrieval until their ultimate disposal. Since organizations are operated by people, it then becomes clear that personnel records of every employee working in an organization need to be created and well-preserved for the current and future references. According to Abias et al. (2021), organizations generate a number of records which include financial records, legal records, administrative records, research records and personnel records, which is the focus of this study. According to Keakopa et al. (2009), personnel records are all recorded information with effect on human resources in the organization and are kept in a systematic order for easy access and retrieval when needed. Furthermore, Kautto and Henttonen (2020) reported that personnel records and other types of records are strategic devices used by the government and its organs to communicate with citizens and in promoting trust between the government and its people.

The [United Republic of Tanzania](#) introduced the records and archives management Act No. 3 of 2002 which, among other things, outlines the responsibility of the head of public office in creation and maintenance of adequate records of transactions and events of their respective public offices through establishment of proper and effective records management practices. Additionally, the Employment and Labour Relations Act (ELRA) of 2004 and the Public Service Act (PSA) of 2002 control the legal and regulatory framework for personnel records administration. These laws provide policies and procedures for the establishment, management, and preservation of personnel records in both the private and public sectors.

According to [Kiondo \(2015\)](#), employers are required by the ELRA to keep personnel records for all employees, which include personal information, employment history, and any disciplinary action taken. The Act also requires employees to have access to their personnel records; however, employers may limit access to some personal information. The PSA specifies principles for personnel record management in the public sector, including regulations for the establishment and maintenance of personal files for each employee. The Act also provides requirements for the keeping and disposal of personnel records, requiring that papers be retained for a minimum of 10 years after an employee's departure. Despite having a defined legal framework for addressing records management concerns in various institutions, records management remains a major issue in Tanzania, particularly in local government offices.

Based on a thesis written by [Cyrille \(2010\)](#) examining how good personnel records management can contribute to good records management and have an impact on decision-making to protect the rights of both the state and individuals, an effective recording system must be implemented both conventionally and electronically. This study aims to identify and evaluate how effective personnel records are in public services at the President's office Public Service management (PO-PSM) Tanzania using the Records Continuum Model framework and the Diffusion of Innovation Model. This study found that personnel records management is an important source of information, especially for documenting employee work histories. Other data indicate that the management of personnel records at PO-PSM faces a number of problems, the main one being the lack of policies, standards, procedures and guidelines that support the effective and efficient management of personnel records.

Another study conducted by [Makwae \(2020\)](#) discussed personnel record management and aimed to investigate the legal framework for personnel record management in the Garissa Regency government. The data resulted that the District Government does not have a legal

framework in personnel records management. Some of the challenges identified include lack of personnel records management policies, lack of integrity, loss of documents/files and poor communication systems.

According to [Aylwin and Policzer \(2020\)](#), effective records management enhances opportunities for better information use or re-use, identification of legal risks and identification of good practices of employees in an organization. An effective records management allows the organization to render better services to customers, provides legal defensibility and leads to improved organizational productivity. Personnel records' sensitivity and their significant contributions to an organization in the service need to be well-received/created, processed, carefully circulated when need arises, and properly preserved to avoid leakage to unauthorized personnel. Despite the sensitivity of personnel records, still there is no clear empirical evidence about how such records are properly managed to avoid leakages of personal information to unauthorized people. There is lack of clear information about the management of personnel records in many institutions and this study was conducted to confirm this assertion with observation performed during a pilot in 2019 using Liwale District Council (LDC) in Lindi region, Tanzania, as a case to represent other districts. Based on previous research, this research aims to investigate the personnel records management and the challenges faced in the management of these records in the Liwale District Council in Tanzania. There is no previous research discussing the evaluation of records management personnel in Liwale District Council in Lindi region, Tanzania.

Method

Study Location

The study was carried out in Tanzania's Liwale District Council in the Lindi Region. Following a baseline survey in 2019, the council was specifically picked. The researchers decided to perform this investigation after noticing significant personal information leakages in numerous departments and poor handling procedures for personnel data.

Research Approach

This study used a mixed research approach, in which a combination of qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analyzed. According to [Migiyo and Magangi \(2011\)](#), when utilized together in one study, quantitative and qualitative methodologies complement each other and provide for a more comprehensive examination of the research subject. Furthermore, due to the triangulation, this study used a mixed strategy. Triangulation examines the consistency of conclusions acquired from several data collection instruments.

Target Population, Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

This study focused on human resources officers, records management officers, and office assistants whose primary responsibilities include dealing with organizational records, including sorting, categorizing, arranging, and recording them in preparation for transfer to the appropriate action officers. In total, 30 people were questioned. The study included the purposeful selection of 14 Liwale District Council human resource officers, eight records management officers, and eight office attendants. The purposeful sampling strategy was used since it was simpler and faster ([Sanwine, 2020](#)).

Data Collection Methods and Analysis Procedures

To gather information from the study participants, an in-depth interview and a questionnaire were used. In-depth interviews were conducted with human resource officers to obtain detailed information regarding the management of personnel records at LDC, while

questionnaires were given to office assistants and records management officers under the condition of anonymity to allow them to freely express sensitive issues. Data from both the qualitative and quantitative sides of the study were gathered. While quantitative data were evaluated using the computer program SPSS version 20, qualitative data were subjected to content analysis after being categorized by themes. Results were presented as percentages and frequencies using tables and figures.

Result and Discussion

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents were gender, age and education level, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable (n =30)		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	10	33.3
	Female	20	66.7
Age	18-29	6	20
	30-49	19	63.3
	50-59	5	16.7
Education level	Secondary school	4	13.3
	Certificate	6	20
	Diploma	14	46.7
	Bachelor	6	20

The results revealed that a majority of respondents were female, implying that females constitute a major workforce in the management of personnel records in Liwale District Council as compared to their male counterparts. This is contrary to the study findings by [Tough and Popoola, \(2009\)](#) who reported that males comprise a large workforce in records management offices in Nigerian private universities. The findings of this study agree with a study by [Popoola and Oluwole \(2007\)](#) who reported that there were more female staff than male staff in the registries working as records officers in the Osun State Civil Service, Nigeria. Furthermore, in Table 1, the study shows that the majority of the respondents were aged between 30-49 years, which implies that they are young and they still have many years to serve as public servants since the compulsory retirement age is 60 years in Tanzania. The study also noted that employers with the age range between 22-45 are active workers who still have many years to work in both private and public sectors. In terms of education level, the study suggests that the majority of the respondents had diploma qualifications, which implies that many employees still need to go for higher education in order to enhance their confidence in job performance. According to [Karunaratne and Wickramasekara \(2020\)](#), education level is a good determinant of employees' confidence in job performance.

Distribution of Respondents by Occupation

The three groups of respondent's records management officers, office assistants and human resources officers were involved in this study because, in their daily duties, they also deal with various records in an organization. For instance, records management officers receive records, classify them and organize them according to their subject where they belong. Office assistants work as conveyor belts, they are responsible for moving records files from records management offices to the office of human resources where actions are taken, and vice versa.

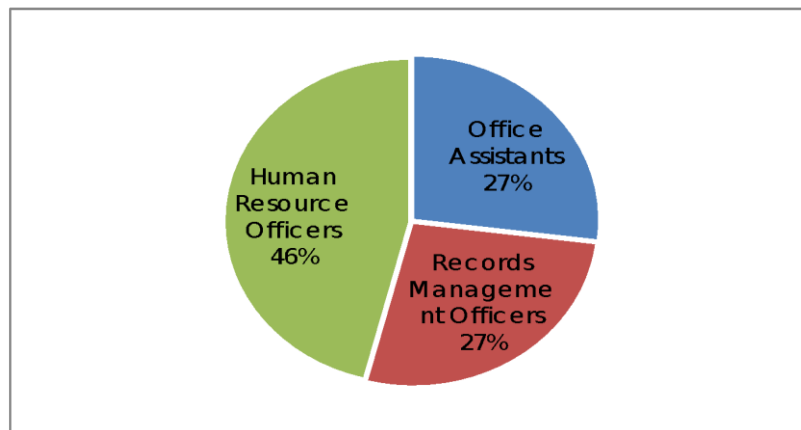


Figure 1. *Distribution of Respondents by Occupation*

This study interviewed many human resources followed by office assistants and records managers (Figure 1). The implication here is that many human resource officers are involved in personnel records management which custodians of records management (records managers and assistant records staff) should do. It is evident from Figure 1 that human resource officers constituted a larger part of the respondents as compared to records management officers and office assistants. The researchers conveniently reached a large number of human resource officers because they are the ones who, to a large extent, deal with the personnel records in making various decisions. [Derua \(2020\)](#) reported that proper records keeping in an organization helps in support of decision-making and increases efficiency and effectiveness of human resource officers by reducing double standards and biasness. Additionally, [Mubofu et al. \(2020\)](#) recommended that all types of records in an organization need to be highly protected by all stakeholders, like human resource officers and records managers, for current and future decision-making. Human resource officers as part of disciplinary committees need to be fair in all matters related to promotion, demotions, transfers, layoffs and in enforcing discipline to employees and this could only be possible if they refer properly to the documented and preserved records.

Availability of Personnel Records

Respondents were asked about the presence of personnel records in their departments.

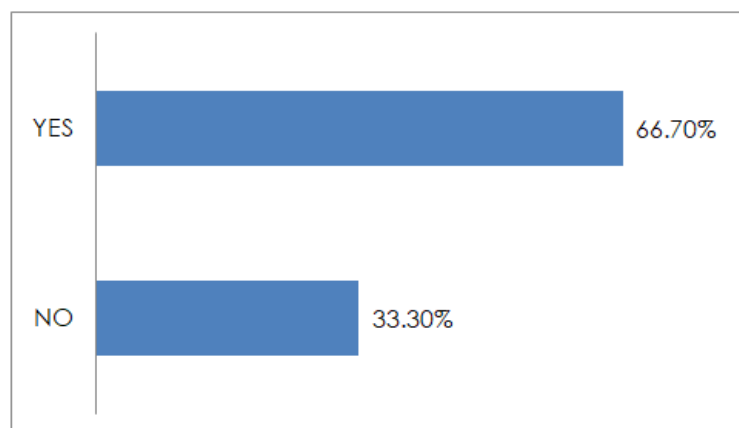


Figure 2. *Number of personnel records*

Findings revealed that a majority of the respondents agreed that there were a number of personnel records in their offices while few of them had no personnel records in their offices

(Figure 2). This implies that most of the departments have and preserve personnel records instead of using the specially designed offices for the management of records. Availability of personnel records in different offices other than the record management offices indicates the poor records management practices at the council and the great risk of leakage of personal information to unauthorized people since many of them are not trained in records management.

Types of Personnel Records

Respondents were requested to indicate the types of personnel records available in the departments that need to be collected and properly preserved for office use

Table 2. Types of Personnel Records (n = 16)

Types of Records	Frequency	Percent
Appointment letters	5	16.7
Letters of confirmation	5	16.7
Application letters	2	6.7
Training and development records	2	6.7
Copy of birth certificate	1	3.3
Wages and salaries slip	1	3.3
Health and social security records	1	3.3
Letters of transfer	1	3.3
Notifications of termination/death and retirement	1	3.3
Medical reports	1	3.3

With regard to the types of personnel records available in various departments of Liwale District Council, the study found that appointment letters, letters of confirmation, application letters and training related records were the prominent records managed in the district council. A further inquiry found that other records present but not in large numbers were copies of birth certificate, wages and salary slip, and health information as well as security records, letter of transfer, notification of termination/death certificates and retirement and medical reports, as summarized in Table 2.

Appointment letters and letters of confirmation were the most cited type of personnel records readily available in various departments at Liwale District Council. This implies that the council needs to put measures in place to ensure that personnel records creation, circulation and preservation are properly controlled to ensure the safety and privacy of an employee's information.

Although most of the records, such as health and social security records, letter of transfer, notification of termination/death and retirement, medical report, wages and salary slips, and copy of birth certificate were least cited, measures still need to be taken to ensure that all personnel records are received, processed, organized, maintained and transferred from one office to another by professional records management officers in the appropriate records management offices in an organization to prevent leakage of employees' sensitive personal information. However, due time and financial limitation, physical audit of records at LDC was not conducted.

Challenges of Personnel Records Management

The study respondents were requested to explain the challenges faced by Liwale District Council in the management of personnel records.

Table 3. Challenges of Personnel Records Management at LDC (n = 16)

Challenges	Frequency	Percent
Inadequate and improper storage facilities	5	16.7
Absence of electronic records management system	4	13.3
Inadequate space for records storage	4	13.3
Human resource officers lack records management skills	3	10.0
Lack of internal training	10	33.3

The results show that challenges like shortage of facilities, absence of electronic system, lack of skills in records management, poor records storage facilities, lack of trained human resource officers to deal with management of records, along with lack of internal training on records management practices among records stakeholders, were the main problems in the district. In-depth probing of key informants (Heads of Department) revealed additional challenges such as failure to observe rules and regulations among staff handling records, complaints from customers seeking service from staff, inadequate skills in records management and lack of records management policy.

The lack of adequate and improper storage facilities implies that personnel records keeping is not effective and thus modern equipment and facilities need to be put in place in order to address this challenge. In the modern world, records are preserved in various facilities like cabinets, shelving, computers and institutional repositories and all organizations should ensure that all these facilities are in place for effective record keeping. [Mohamed, Rasheli, and Mwangike \(2018\)](#) reported that inadequate facilities and equipment for records keeping deter effective management of records in an organization.

Furthermore, results from the interview also revealed similar findings whereby the interviewed respondents echoed that:

"... Generally, the facilities used in keeping personnel records are inadequate and in some cases are not suitable for preservation of vital records that need to be consulted in the future for decision-making. For instance, the shelves are open and the files kept can easily be attacked by dust, dirt, insects and other harmful organisms like rats and mice. The few available file cabinets are full of records and no space for the current records. Although this challenge has been reported to the management no immediate measures have been taken to address the challenge ..."(Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)

Absence of an electronic records management system implies that electronic records are neglected and are not preserved by the records management offices in Liwale District Council. It is important for the council to start planning, procuring and implementing electronic records management systems because, currently, records are created, processed, shared, disseminated and preserved digitally. [Mabera \(2020\)](#) noted that among the causes of poor records management in Nigerian Universities is absence of an electronic records management systems.

Additionally, [Tsabedze \(2020\)](#) conducted a study on e-records readiness in the context of e-government strategy in eSwatini and data collected from 19 government ministries of Swaziland. The study revealed that employees create electronic records and store them in various formats and keep backup using external drives. This situation is dangerous because employees retire or resign without proper handover or take over. This kind of electronic

records management was also observed to be practiced by human resource officers in Liwale District Council where this study was conducted. In such cases, access and retrieval of such personnel records kept and preserved on individual computers in different external drives tends to be a challenge. One of the interviewed respondents had the following to say:

"... Up to the moment, records management offices don't have electronic records management systems. However, in our short-term plan, the council has set aside funds to train records officers on how to deal with the management of electronic records before the system is implemented. Currently, only a manual system is used to manage the records from the time the record is received / created to the time it is disposed..." (Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)

Findings of this study in Table 3 show that failure to observe rules and regulations is another challenge that deters the effective management of personnel records. Records officers, when asked what rules and regulations are breached at the records management office, noted that most staff, especially senior staff, are forced to enter into the closed section even if they are not permitted by the existing rules. This implies that records officers need to create awareness to staff on the adherence to the rules. It is through the enforcement of rules and regulations as well as awareness creation that unauthorized personnel will not enter into the records office, that records and information in it will remain safe.

Complaint from customers has been contributed by excessive leakage of employees' information and loss of the records. However, the study findings indicate that Liwale District Council has put in place initiatives to identify and understand the causes of customer complaints, which is an important step in problem solving. [Hu et al. \(2019\)](#) reported that ability to understand the causes of customer complaints is important for records management offices to improve the effectiveness of services. With regard to the leakage of personal information interviewed, respondents had this to comment:

"... The probable cause of leakage of personal information is lack of adequate space to accommodate all the files, especially the closed files. There has been a tendency of disregarding the closed files and regarding them as useless, as a result they are not well-preserved and protected from theft. They are stored in rooms that have no protection which gives a chance for people to access and misuse important personnel records..." (Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)

Inadequate skills in the records management can be reflected in the education level of the study respondents found in the study area whereby the majority had diploma qualification; this indicates that a large number of employees at LDC require a higher education level in order to increase their skills and knowledge, which is important for effective service provision. Effective management of records to a large extent depends on the skills and knowledge that a records keeper has in the management of records ([Nwaomah, 2015](#)). These challenges have been caused by a shortage of employees with high education levels to take care of the records at Liwale District Council. Furthermore, the interviewees claimed that the number of employees in the records management profession is very small such that it decreases efficiency in the management of personnel records. They contended that they have only five personnel while the actual demand of records management personnel is ten. The interviewed respondents generally commented as in the following

"... Really we need more professional records managers in this council due to the fact that the current number of records officers is very low compared to the huge responsibilities pertaining to records management

in open and closed records management offices...” (Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)

Inadequate space for records storage is another critical challenge in the management of personnel records reported by respondents. This implies that the space available for the storage and preservation of records is not enough to accommodate all the records received by LDC. The interviewed respondents revealed that the rooms in both open and closed records management offices are very small and that they cannot house all the records received.

“The open records management office apart from being used as a record processing chamber it is also used as an office for records managers. This is not healthy because records managers may bring water, food and other snacks that once they drop in the office may attract insects like cockroaches, which are harmful to records. The current offices were not purposely designed and built as records offices so they lack the qualities of a good records management office...” (Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)

Human resources officers deal with available personnel records when confronted with decision-making needs about an employee. However, human resource officers need to have skills on how these records should be properly managed and protected. In this study, it was revealed by 10% of the respondents that lack of records management skills among human resource officers was a challenge in the management of records received from the records management offices for action taking. One of the interviewed respondents echoed that:

“... Records management skill is highly needed by human resource personnel because almost all universities that offer the course of human resource lack records management modules and thus graduates of human resources courses lack knowledge on records management. For instance, here in Liwale district there are 14 human resources officers and most of us graduated from different universities with different education levels but we have no records management skills at all and, in most cases, we are the main source for leakage of personal information due to lack of records management ethics...” (Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)

Records management policy is an important tool in the management of records in an organization as it guides the records management officers on the management of records in its life cycle. However, in this study, it was revealed that 3% of the respondents noted that lack of records management policy is a challenge in the management of records at LDC. For instance, [Oweghoro, \(2015\)](#) reported that the absence of a records management policy has a negative impact in the records appraisal practices and in the disposal of records. A study conducted at the Michigan State University by [Robyns and Woolman \(2011\)](#) established that university records management policy is a vital tool used to determine appraisal and value of information contained in a record.

Lack of internal training on records management practices among records stakeholders was indicated by 33.3% of the study respondents as the challenge in the management of records at LDC. This implies that respondents in the study area are in need of internal training. Training helps to equip staff with new development in their professionalism. One of the interviewed respondents argued that some of the employees need training in records management since they have been shifted from other departments and now they work as



records officers without any knowledge of records management. Another interviewed respondent had the following to say.

"... Despite being few in number still some records management officers are not knowledgeable in records management issues. They have been transferred from other cadres without any capacity building initiatives to equip them for executing records management duties..." (Human Resource Officer, Liwale District Council)

Conclusion

Personnel records management is a cornerstone of the decision-making process in an organization regardless whether the records are in print or electronic format. This study has established that a copy of birth certificate, application forms, appointment forms, and letters of confirmation, wages and salaries slips, training and development records, medical report, health and security records, letter of transfer, notification of termination/death and retirement were the highly personal records found in Liwale District Council.

The study further concludes that inadequate and improper storage facilities, absence of electronic records management system, failures to observe rules and regulations, complaints from customers due to loss of records and leakage of personal information, inadequate skills in the records management, inadequate space for records storage, human resource officers lack records management skills, lack of a records management policy and lack of internal training are the challenges faced by Liwale District Council in the management of personnel records.

Implication of this study that the findings suggest that there may be a lack of awareness or understanding among employees regarding the importance of certain types of personnel records. This highlights the importance of communication and training in ensuring that employees understand the significance of various records and how to properly handle them. The emphasis on the need for professional records management officers and appropriate records management offices reflects the importance of the records management function in maintaining the confidentiality, accuracy, and accessibility of personnel records. This aligns with the principles of records management theory, which emphasizes the importance of systematic and standardized approaches to records creation, maintenance, and disposition.

The concern about leakage of employees' sensitive personal records highlights the potential legal and ethical implications of mishandling such records. This aligns with the principles of privacy and security in human resource management, which emphasize the importance of protecting employees' personal information from unauthorized access or disclosure.

This study was exclusively conducted at LDC, and the participants were purposefully chosen from human resources officers, records management officers, and office attendants. As a result, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all districts in Tanzania.

Based on the study findings, the researchers recommend the following: LDC management should employ more qualified records management officers with higher education level for the effective information services at LDC. LDC management should design and build proper records management offices with enough space to accommodate the records created and those which are received by the LDC. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology should reform the human resource curriculums in the country to include an aspect of records management, which is vital for the human resource graduates to possess. Conduct capacity development to all employees working as records officers without knowledge of records management. Liwale District Council in consultation with other stakeholders should address



all the identified challenges faced in the management of personnel records for better decision-making.

Based on the conclusion of the study on personnel records management in Liwale District Council, some possible areas for further research could be: Evaluation of the effectiveness of current personnel records management policies and procedures: A comprehensive evaluation of the current policies and procedures for personnel records management in the council could help identify gaps and shortcomings that need to be addressed. This could involve a review of the council's existing policy and the development of recommendations for improvement. Investigation of the potential benefits of electronic records management systems: The study highlights the absence of an electronic records management system as a major challenge in the council's personnel records management. Further research could explore the potential benefits of such systems, including improved access to information, enhanced security, and reduced risk of data loss or leakage. Examination of the impact of inadequate skills in records management: The study identifies inadequate skills in records management as a challenge facing the council. Further research could explore the impact of this issue on the effective management of personnel records, including the potential costs associated with errors or omissions in record-keeping.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed to the final manuscript. The contribution of all authors: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing original draft preparation, writing review and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

All authors have no conflict of interest related to this study.

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