

Professionalism in Records Management Practices to Ensure Good Governance in Malaysia: A Review

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Abstract. Professionalism is a very important aspect in the execution of all processes and activities in records management practice. It is imperative to ensure proper management of records to curb problems such as unauthorized access, loss of information, poor handling, and non-compliance with established procedures that are recurrent in records management practice due to lack of professionalism among records managers. The objective of this paper is therefore to examine the elements of professionalism required in records management in Malaysia. Various articles in reputable online databases were searched using the keywords “professionalism,” “records management practices” and “good governance.” The study found that there are aspects of professionalism to be considered in records management, with the most important elements, namely accountability, integrity, and honesty, to ensure the smooth running of records management. The study concluded that professionalism is an important component of the professional requirements of records management as it is an important aspect of good governance. Professionalism, therefore, involves not only knowledge and skills, but also attitude and behaviour.

Keywords: Records management practices, professionalism, good governance, Malaysia

1 Introduction

In Malaysia, the cadre archives officer takes over the responsibility as records manager since the profession is not created in Malaysia. A records manager can be defined as a person who is responsible for handling records management from the process of records creation, use and dissemination, maintenance, and disposition of the entire records life cycle. Generally, there is no specific position of records manager in Malaysian organizations. Since the right record professionals are not in place, the

present records personnel are not able to demonstrate a professional body of knowledge not only to identify, describe and make available the mere facts and data, but also to provide the meaning-rich information of records as evidence of contextualized transactions. The national archives personnel should continue to professionally grow so that they remain competent and be in a position to ensure proper records management standards prevail in public records management units (Katu, 2016, Ngulube, 2001). As a result, it will put all the vital records in danger and obstruct the success of good governance in the public sector.

Governance is about how power is distributed and shared, how policies are formulated, priorities set and stakeholders are made accountable (UNESCO, 2017). It can be concluded that governance promotes a rule of law that leads to the organization's integrity and effectiveness in decision-making, services, and interest. Good governance refers to government agencies' conduct in implementing innovative policies and programs to increase the quality of public service with the ultimate aim of increasing economic growth (Asaolu et al., 2016; Grindle, 2004; Hellman et al., 2000). Professionalism is required to achieve excellent governance since it includes a whole package for the individual who handles records. Professionalism is defined as a person's abilities, thorough knowledge, competence, and behaviour in a specific job. As a result, such a person will find it easier to manage the many forms of information that will be registered and given to some extent.

Professionalism is one of the most important aspects that must be implemented in public sector record management practices to maintain record integrity. According to Nor et al. (2022) in public services the quality of service is largely determined by the attitude and behaviour and professionalism. In Malaysia, two (2) universities, Universiti Selangor (UNISEL) and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), have offered courses and programmes in records management to develop records management professionals. Records management professional requires a certain set of competencies dealing with all sorts of information and has the initiative to improvise, and sharpen the skills to give better service delivery to users. To become a professional record manager, he or she is required to undergo special training to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Professionalism

Professionalism is cultivated by the individual personally. It can be acquired from experience, and exposure other than academic qualification. According to Freidson (1973), professionalism is defined as a process by which an organized occupation, usually, but not always by claiming special esoteric competence for the quality of its work and its benefits to society, obtains the exclusive right to perform a particular kind of work, controls training for and access to it, and controls the right of determining and evaluating the way the work is performed. It is a high expectation in terms of technical skills, competence, and integrity of the professional. Moreover, Chan et al. (2002)

agreed that professionalism is a high expectation in terms of technical skills, competence, and integrity of the professional. Professionalism relates not only to the levels of education and qualifications of the workforce but also to the professional approach to the conduct of business activities (Raymond, 2008). These show that records management professionals must be equipped with appropriate skills, knowledge, competence in their field, integrity and accountability for their actions and decisions.

Failure to accept responsibility for mistakes, noncompliance, or neglect can diminish professionalism and confidence within an organisation. Some of the issues as such misuse of authority, conflict of interest, bribery, misuse of insider knowledge, abuse of confidential information for personal purposes, corruption, and misuse of trust, even have been committed by a few of the public servants, their effect, has tarnished the image of public servants in overall. These issues have become global issues due to the continuous stream of governance failure. A lot of cases have been reported almost every day in the newspaper and social media on the unethical behaviours committed by public servants, especially in Malaysia (Nafi & Kamaluddin, 2019). Unethical behaviour might come from inconsistent application of records management policies and practices across an organization. This may involve selective enforcement, favoritism, or a failure to regularly follow set procedures.

Records management professionals must uphold proper records management practices, from its creation until disposal of records. Failure to do so can result in unprofessional practices, such as unauthorized access, data breaches, or non-compliance with regulatory requirements. Furthermore, proper records management practices are not fully implemented in some of the organizations and not follow the life cycle of records from creation until disposal. This is because the number of records in an organization is growing rapidly. Managing growth and the variety of content and location is a complex process (Imana Harun et al., 2018). These issues could diminish the trust of citizens in government accountability and disrupt the process of good governance.

Inadequate training and education on records management principles and practices might result in unprofessional behaviour and practices. This includes a lack of understanding of legal obligations, incorrect record handling, or a failure to conform to industry standards. Moreover, it has been reported that some vital records are not completely documented due to incompetent staff who are not well trained in record management and cannot fulfil the demand of expected services as required by the public sector. This happened when employees given the task of handling records were from different disciplines other than records management. As a consequence, managing records will not meet its goals because they do not possess the required knowledge and skills and worse, exhibit poor commitment (Isa et al., 2019). This has caused delays, errors, and inaccurate information to be used promptly due to misunderstanding and poor coordination.

2.2 Professionalism and Good Governance

Nor et al., (2022) mentioned that civil servants or apparatus as public apparatus, have an important role in providing services to the public in a more just, equitable, honest, and responsible manner. The State Civil Apparatus is the most important component and pillar in realizing good governance together with the business world (corporate governance) and civil society, which must run in harmony with their respective roles and responsibilities. Good governance is achieved through professional governance through a good governance organization management system, quality public services and apparatus resources that are reliable, professional, integrity, innovative and have world-class capacity. State Civil Apparatus is demanded to be more professional, provide services to the community honestly, and fairly and have a global outlook and is expected to be able to continue to develop by increasing their quality and competence. The State Civil Apparatus must be able to strengthen the attitude and enthusiasm of service to the service, protection and community empowerment. Good governance theory (Ganie, 2000) states that the behaviour of the state civil apparatus can be an antecedent of good governance.

According to Sami et al., (2018), professionalism will increase their commitment level with the public and organization. Professionally strong public managers will always try their best to achieve socially desirable outcomes from the provision of these services to establish public trust in the organization and particularly in the government. For the government to achieve good governance a records management professional needs to require a certain set of competencies dealing with all sorts of information have initiative to improvise, and sharpen the skills to allow fast service delivery to users. Unfortunately, a shortage and incomplete records impede effective public auditing as auditors spend considerable time looking for relevant records, which sometimes are only futile. This situation cannot be allowed to continue if the government is serious about improving the performance of public departments and at the same time, becoming more transparent (Isa et al., 2019).

Public administration needs to turn to records and archives management professionals and involve them in the legislative, planning, and operating work regarding information management and its influence on good governance in public organizations. Specific training by records management professionals for recordkeeping is useful for public servants. All levels of the administrative chain should be trained and involved in records management processes (Dikopoulou & Mihiotis, 2012). To become a professional record manager, they are required to undergo special training to acquire the necessary skills to handle records which are confidential and private. Moreover, records managers must have a dynamic influence, for the duration of the life of a record. As suggested in the websites from Docufile (Pty) Ltd. (2016), The Record Manager must have the ability to do the following:

- Make Records Management Programs and Services accessible all through the organization.
- Have the capacity to catch records of numerous types.
- Intelligently arranged and precisely portrayed records.
- Give records access to approved people.

- Store all records and keep up security over them.
- Deal with the destruction of records according to a retention schedule.
- Make accessible electronic records and information management services.

2.3 Professionalism and Records Management Practices

Professionalism encompasses a variety of dimensions. It is not only polite behaviour or academic competence; on the contrary, it is a mixture of several qualities that contribute to professionalism. A professional needs to have specialized knowledge in a particular field. This is one of the main characteristics of a true professional. If the individual has gaps in his knowledge, the contribution, that he can make, is minimal. Being competent is also important. If an individual has all the academic certificates but, still fails to work competently, then it is also disruptive to the individual as well as organizational performance. Professionally strong public managers will always try their best to achieve socially desirable outcomes from provision of these services to establish public trust in the organization and particularly on the government.

Imana Harun et al. (2018) found that records management was lacking with professionalism in records management because of a lack of skilled staff. In an organization, there are staff who are managing records who are not familiar with record management practices and lack the skills. The unskilled registry personnel would jeopardise the security of the records in public registries. The record was heaped on the floor and a few records were torn and tied in bundles in an institution becomes commonplace if it relates to delays and failures in service caused by absent or lost records. The delay and failure to access to the records also may lead to the failure in the delivery of information. In this regard, lack of records may not only delay but also lead to miscarriage in the delivery of justice.

This is also mentioned by Omehia & Lulu-pokubo (2020) that records management is not professionalized in most organizations. People who look after records in many organizations lack the skills required for managing records. Another challenge facing management of legal records is lack of adequate and well-trained staff. The staffs manning these records are not well trained in the area of records management and archives. Some of the staff engages in unethical practices like hiding files and misfiling. Therefore, they cannot manage these records professionally. The staff are inadequate and there will be no transparency and accountability. This will give an organization a bad image and it may even close its business. Professional staff need to be employed, they should be people of integrity and who have good public relations.

Other traits such as honesty, integrity, and politeness is also important for a professional. Ethics refers to the guidelines that state the dos and don'ts in a specific context whereas professionalism refers to the specific traits that are expected of a professional. Ethics are usually stated whereas professionalism is cultivated by the individual personally through experience and academic background. In addition, the evolution of new technology has put the government to devise the integrity value of the public sector with strong command in leadership to steer the efficiency without abandoning the value of good governance (Said et al., 2015).

Trained and skilled staff is important in managing records such as integrity, protection, availability, compliance, disposition, transparency, retention of the record and information in principles of records and information management (RIM). The

improper records management program in managing various types of records will surely affect the image of the institutions. Hence it will constitute the bad implication towards government service delivery. So, all of these tasks should be conducted by records professionals because they are qualified professionals as compared to other staff (Hanis Kamarudin et al., 2018).

Knowledge and skills are acquired in managing records and being confident in everything that they do. Wamukoya (2000) emphasized that training is a critical part of modern management. There also included inadequate staff may lead to records not being acknowledged through lawful and managerial necessities as a result of invalid applications, deficiency of legitimate directions, absence of value-based regulatory structure, incapable records management system. Without skilled and experienced personnel in managing public records in Namibia may lead to the collapse of the programme records management practices. Ethics in records management is crucial in determining how good the profession of its records management and ensures that employees complete work with honesty and integrity, for example, if some vital record or information is leaked, it will affect and threaten the confidentiality and the individual's privacy.

In the case of Nigeria, corporate leaders who have ignored professionalism in their business activities have caused corporate financial misconducts that have affected investors and the entire economy stated that unethical behaviour in the banking sector has caused billions of dollars in losses, incurred legal battles, harmed organizations' reputations, and created a financial vulnerability. Bankers who exhibit professionalism know their job descriptions and responsibilities; affirm the purpose of the organization; and exhibit integrity, sincerity, and proficiency (Alberto, 2015). It requires professionalism to navigate these situations and make decisions that align with ethical standards and organizational policies.

As stated in the report, several weaknesses have been observed during the audit namely improper payment; work/procurement did not follow specifications/ low in quality/ unsuitable; unreasonable delays; wastage; weaknesses in revenue management and management of the government's assets (National Audit Department, 2013). The report further discussed that the weaknesses happen due to the negligence of the officer in various ways such as unable to comply with the rules and regulations, lack of monitoring, lack of project management skills and failure to give attention to the outcome/impact of the programmes/activities/projects. Due to this negligence, a significant amount of money has been wasted (Said et al., 2015).

According to Isa et al. (2019), employees given the task of handling records were from different disciplines other than records management. Consequently, managing records will not meet its goals because they do not possess the required knowledge and skills and worse, exhibit poor commitment. It is worth noting that records management is not the responsibility of certain individuals or departments, but every nook and cranny must be responsible until it becomes a culture in the public sector. Ismail and Jamaludin (2011) mentioned that records management works in silo, which reiterates the long-time dilemma of records professionals in the public sector as it is an invisible profession. Their presence is not seen or felt by other professionals; hence they are perceived as insignificant in supporting efficient and viable operations. Moreover, records professionals cannot remain in the silo, as making records management

exclusive only distances them and they might eventually disappear from the organization. They must develop a working professional relationship, particularly with the Chief Information Officer, in their respective ministry who would be the right person to champion.

Nengosmasha (2009) highlighted that proficient records managers are required in an institution. In producing their skilled record managers should work with various parties, for example, in reviewing the law, making policies, and developing and analyzing procedures and standards and conducting training. Professional competency, also frequently referred to as professional competence, occupational competency or occupational competence, is a commonly yet inconsistently used term in management science, organizational studies, professional education and vocational training. It broadly refers to the individual knowledge, skills and abilities that are required to perform the activities within a specific organization or profession (Boyatzis, 1982; Woodruffe, 1993). In the business world, employers and human resource managers look for candidates with generic and transferable skills for most job roles or specific positions (Stasz, 1997). Mansfield (1993) believed professional competencies were rooted in the reality of work, so he proposed a functional approach that defines professional competency by the standards of a specific profession, evaluated by the outcomes of the activities performed in that profession.

He suggested four (4) types of competencies that are required for one to be considered fully competent in any work role:

- (1) technical skills;
- (2) contingency management skills;
- (3) task management skills; and
- (4) role environment skills.

Technical skills are those concrete skills required to perform a specific job; if one exhibits technical skills, one can use the appropriate tools for the job and follow an appropriate set of logical steps to complete it successfully. Contingency management skills are those skills that enable one to assess risk and uncertainty, variations in practice over time and to succeed at work via decision-making, problem-solving and process management. Task management involves integrating different role components to achieve a specific task. Role environment skills are broad sets of skills that are required to work in the particular environment in which the employee is immersed, and they can include “soft skills” such as excellent verbal communication, ability to manage upward, understanding of the norms and ethics in one’s work environment (Feng & Richards, 2018).

Sami et al. (2018) highlighted professionalism is including honesty, competency, accountability, self-regulation and specialized knowledge of his field and duties. Nevertheless, records management scholars attain that organizations should define and assign in a holistic fashion the authority and responsibilities required for applying the relevant policy. These responsibilities should be reflected in job descriptions and must concern any level of staff. Senior management should have the whole responsibility, should allocate the required resources, and finally should promote compliance with records management procedures across the organization. Records management professionals should have the primary responsibility of designing, implementing, and

coordinating records management program. Managers and team leaders must ensure that their staff create and keep records according to their activities and based on the established policy. Specific groups of staff should have duties such as the quality and compliance, the ICT applications and the security (Dikopoulou & Mihiotis, 2012).

Though, access to accurate and complete records are crucial factors contributing to increasing the risk of exposing corruption. They provide the evidence to hold officials accountable and, where necessary, prosecute wrong doers (Barata et al., 2001, 38). For this to happen, public administrations need to have implemented records management systems, with the resources for their upkeep and improvement, and above all, with qualified staff (Casadesús de Mingo & Cerrillo-i-Martínez, 2018). A qualified records management professional is needed to oversee all the processes and detect all the wrongdoing from good records management practices.

3 Research Methodology

Various literature from previous researchers have been reviewed to explore the professionalism aspects that are important and can be utilized in records management practices. The analysis was done through a brief review of the literature that is related to the research objective. The literature survey is based on a search for the keywords “professionalism”, “records management practices”, and “good governance” on reputable online database. All the articles found is refined based on the research objectives by eliminating irrelevant articles. Subsequently, this study outlined the elements of professionalism in records management practices for achieving good governance.

This study will only focus on the three (3) major elements of professionalism based on the literature review, namely accountability, integrity, and honesty, as they have an impact on records management practices. It will be more comprehensive if the study discusses extensively each element of professionalism, which could determine the strength of other elements that can be considered in records management practices for achieving good governance in Malaysia.

4 Result and Discussion

Based on numerous literatures reviewed, the professionalism elements have been gathered are as tabulated below. Based on Table 1, it can be concluded that the most preferable elements of professionalism are honesty, accountability and integrity. Accountability is defined as an organization's ability to be responsible for its actions, decisions, policies, and products (Chaterera, 2016). Records management professional who has accountability elements can guide to provide verified, complete, and trustworthiness of the records as evidence. This is because incomplete records may cause the organization could not justify the evidence of their actions. It shows that the accountability element is crucial to provide a reliable and legally verified source of evidence to make informed decision making to achieve good governance. Schön (2017)

stated that personal accountability is a reflection of their honesty and integrity, and it's an essential element of professionalism.

Table 1: Elements of Professionalism

Sources	Ahmad Sarji (1994)	United Nation (2000)	IRMT (2002)	INTAN (2003)	Said et al. (2015)	Schon (2017)	Imana Harun et al. (2018)	Sami et al. (2018)	Omehia & Lulu-pokubo (2020)
Honesty	/			/	/	/		/	
Competency		/	/					/	
Accountability	/	/		/		/		/	
Self-Regulation		/			/	/		/	
Specialized Knowledge/ Intellectual	/			/				/	
Skills			/				/		/
Integrity	/			/	/	/			/
Impartiality/ Neutrality	/			/					
Good in Public Relations					/				/
Creativity				/					
Innovation				/					

The other major element that have been highlighted by many authors is integrity. Integrity is an essential characteristic of human beings. At present, it is also considered as one of the essential features for the smooth functioning of an organization or institution in the modern world. In an organizational viewpoint, integrity or ethical behaviour not only refers to being corrupted or fraudulent, but it also lies in the quality or characteristic of individual or organizational behaviour that represents the manner of acting in accordance with moral values, standards and rules accepted by the members of an organization and the society (Kolthoff *et al.*, 2010; Bauman, 2013). Therefore, records management professionals need to have these elements, as they will grasp and comply with all the policies and standards that have been outlined by the organization. Integrity shapes staff who have good behaviour and are free from negative counter behaviours such as stealing, vandalism, prolonging unauthorized breaks, and skipping work (Arifin & Ahmad, 2016). Essentially, integrity comprises superior qualities that exist among individuals and these qualities are rooted in the principles of adherence to honesty and high moral practices (Wook *et al.*, 2023). Besides that, honesty also the element that been garnered many highlights due to the significant of the element in records management practices.

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Figure 1 presents the word cloud that was developed using the online software. Figure 1 illustrates the most common word that appeared in the biggest fonts. The relatively fewer common words appeared in smaller fonts. The word cloud shows that the most frequent words presented in Table 1 on elements of professionalism based on the literature review search. The word cloud is a useful tool to present complex information in a simplified manner (Birko, Dove, and Ozdemir 2015).



Figure 1: Word cloud for most common words as appeared in the professionalism elements

4 Conclusion

Professionalism in records management practices benefits smooth and fast delivery services in the government sector, as it is a body that manages a vast amount of records that have been generated daily and involve many activities and transactions. Professionalism is not only about knowledge and skills; it is also closely related to attitude and behaviour. This study found that the most required elements which are accountability, integrity, and honesty. However, other elements can also be considered and cannot be ruled out, as they can also contribute to the success of good governance. Good governance entails having ideal administrative practices in handling national resources and making informed choices while acting ethically to defend citizens' rights. Without professionalism in records management practices, good governance is impossible to realize. The analysis could be better if the study encompassed all the elements of professionalism in records management practices and compared the entire set of elements to be considered for the success of good governance.

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