

Placing the cart before the horse: E-records policy experiences and lessons from Zimbabwe's provincial government

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Abstract

There is remarkable growth in use of electronic records in Zimbabwe. The professional management of such records is brought under spotlight as government ministries in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe manage electronic records without electronic records policies in place. The absence of electronic records policies implies lack of guidance regarding what should be done, how, when, why and by whom. The implementation of electronic records programmes in provincial government ministries before formulating and mobilising policies that guide such programmes is akin to placing the cart before the horse. Developing countries which face similar scenarios may take a leaf from the experiences of Zimbabwe where absence of electronic records policies has resulted in poor management of electronic records as well as in marked variations in the management of electronic records by different provincial ministries of the same government as well as by different departments of the same ministries. The study calls for formulation, use and enforcement of electronic records policies to enhance proper and professional management of electronic records as well as to enable such records retain their utility, authenticity and integrity. This qualitative study solicited data from 16 records and information assistants from 16 government ministries in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe as well as from the National Archives' provincial archivist. Data were also collected through personal observation and document reviews of records survey reports, internal correspondences and annual reports. Data were analysed thematically in line with the three objectives of the study.

Key words: electronic records; electronic records policy; records management; records policy; electronic records management