

Managing records and archives in the absence of a registered professional association. A Zimbabwe case

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Abstract: This study focused on establishing how records were being managed in the absence of a registered professional association of records management. It came as a result of evidence that in Zimbabwe there was no registered professional association for records management raising questions on how were ideas shared amongst records and archives professionals. The study is qualitative in nature and convenient sampling technique was used to obtain views on how records management activities were operating in an environment where they do not have a registered professional body. The study probed further to establish what records and archives profession was missing as a result of not having a registered professional body. Study findings showed that records management practices were being conducted guided by the National Archives of Zimbabwe (public sector records) while private organisations had the records personnel deciding individually on records management issues. The study also showed that there was lack of a platform to organise effective seminars and workshops that would discuss issues relating to ethics and professional conduct, curriculum development and continuing professional development. The study went on to establish that the absence of having a registered professional association was affecting the growth of the profession, training of records and archives students and the professional progression. It was recommended that there is need for the existing informal professional associations to register and be the mouth and ears of the records profession in Zimbabwe

I. INTRODUCTION

The bringing together of different minds in order to achieve a common goal should not be ignored by records and archives professionals as it brings with it numerous advantages that can uplift a profession. Webster (1999) state that a profession can only exist when there are bonds between the practitioners and those bonds can take but one state, that of a formal association. In Zimbabwe, different types of professional bodies have been created, the aim being to champion their cause and have authority in their field of operation, network, set and revise standards, voice out the concerns of their profession and above all take the profession to greater heights. This has resulted in setting and enforcing ethics and professional standards, revising policies, professional development of their members, curriculum development, advocacy and lobbying activities for the profession. Studies have however shown that in Zimbabwe, there has been no Records and Archives registered Professional association activities recorded over the years. This is further compounded by a study conducted by the International Council on Archives (2012) showing that only South Africa has registered records and archives professional

association in Southern Africa. This leaves one wonder how the records and archives professionals scattered across the country contribute towards the management of records and archives management. This paper sought to establish the effects of operating in an environment where there is no professional association responsible for the management of records and archives profession and their impact in the development of the profession in Zimbabwe.

Statement of the Problem

Professions have grown and made greater strides due to bringing together ideas, setting standards, meeting, lobbying, advocacy, curriculum development, training and deliberating issues affecting the profession. With institutions in Zimbabwe offering Records and archives management from certificate level to Masters level and at the same time producing graduates who are later employed in memory institutions, this raised questions. This probed researcher to establish records and archives management practices in the absence of a registered professional body and the effects there after.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following research objectives

The importance of having a registered professional association when managing records

To explore the effects of managing records and archives in the absence of a registered professional association

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research question;

What is the importance of having a professional association in the management of records in Zimbabwe?

What are records and archives professionals in Zimbabwe missing by operating without having a records and archives registered professional association?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach and data was collected using the open ended online questionnaires. Due to covid 19 pandemic, the target population was conveniently sampled and results were presented thematically, in a narrative analysis manner. This qualitative study employed a Convenient sampling technique to gauge the work and effects of the professional association in records and archives. It

targeted the lecturers, students and employees in the records and archives management field and data was obtained using an open ended questionnaire method while document analysis was used on a complimentary basis.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

What is a professional association?

A professional association is a body made up of people derived from a certain profession whose aim is to share ideas and develop the profession through setting up regulating instruments and helping the profession match up with evolving industrial demands. Moyo (2016) defines a professional association as a group of people in the same profession who come together to create a professional organisation to facilitate the achievement of very specific objectives, especially in providing service and enhancing the careers of professional members. UNESCO (1995) defines it as an organisation that provides a forum for communication between members of a profession, pooling knowledge, experience, ideas and for the mentoring of those new to the field by experienced members. As such, the above definitions clearly indicate that a professional body in any field is a composite of experts of a subject/course/profession who converge together to share ideas from time to time and come to an agreement on issues to map the path that should be followed in a profession. In records and archives management, this would mean the creation of a forum between archivists, records managers and action officers to share experiences, ideas, set policies, frameworks and regulate the training of records and archives professionals in a certain country or region. Apart from that, the records and archives profession becomes the mouthpiece and representative of records and archives aimed at lobbying, advocating, and developing records and archives care'

Table 1: Records and Archives Professional Associations in Africa

Country	Professional Registers association
Burkina Faso	Association Burkinabe Des Gestionnaires De L'information Documentaire (Abgid)
Burundi	Association Des Bibliothecaires, Archivistes Et Documentalistes Du Burundi (ABADBU)
Cameroon	Association Des Professionnels De La Documentation Et Des Archives Du Cameroun (ADAC) Assocaiton Des Bibliothecaires, Archivistes, Documentalistes Et Museographes Du Cameroun(ABADCAM)
Chad	Association Pour La Sauvegarde Et Le Promotion Des Bibliothèques, Archives Et Documentation (Asprobad)
Congo	Association Congolaise Pour La Promotion Culturelle Et Artistique
Guinea	National Association Of Librarians, Archivists, Documentalists And Museum (ANMBAD)
Guinea Bissau	Association Des Bibliothecaires, Archivistes Et

	Documentalistes
Kenya	Kenyan Association Of Records Managers And Archivists (KARMA)
Mali	Association Of Librarians, Archivists And Documentalists (AMBAD)
Senegal	Association Senegalaise Des Bibliothecaires, Archivistes Et Documentalistes (Asbad) Refebad - Reseau Des Femmes Bibliothecaires Archivistes Documentalistes
Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone Association Of Archivists, Librarians And Information Scientists (Slaalis)
South Africa	South African Society of Archivists (Sasa) South Africa Association For Archivists And Manuscript Librarians (Amlib)
Tunisia	Association Tunisienne Des Documentalistes, Bibliothecaires Et Archivistes (ATDBA)

Source: ICA (2012)

IV. ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The role played by professional associations world over is immense and it includes the following;

i. Aggregating thoughts and ideas of professional members

Through professional associations, records and archives members can share ideas which in turn are used by the professionals within the profession. This facilitates networking by having professionals from different backgrounds interacting on records management issue. This is supported by Moyo (2016) who states that a sense of belonging and a voice is provided by a professional association while at the same time creating a platform to collate and collect viewpoints on practice and policy. This, according to UNESCO (1995) makes a professional association an information repository and powerhouse of professional expertise from which stakeholders can contain information and direction.

ii. Research and education

The growth and development of any professional solely relies on research and education. Seminars and workshops can be organised and done by information professionals yearly. This plays an important role in adding to the body of knowledge of information science while at the same time helps bring about new ideas to the profession which are instrumental for growth. Fisher (1997) views professional associations in the information science field by the value they bring through research and professional development. The research output can be incorporated to the curriculum and as such ensure that the knowledge obtained is imparted and the stagnation of the profession is avoided. In support UNESCO (1995) brings to attention the fact that associations can help determine archival methodology by forming task forces to research and debate aspects of practice.

On the aspect of education, association can decide on qualifications required for entry into the profession and promote the introduction of formal courses of study that enable people to obtain these qualifications. They can be training institutions themselves through offering training sessions and workshops to update the qualifications of already working professionals. For example, the records managers can be trained on electronic records management systems and the aspect of new technologies in records and archives management such as block chaining and artificial intelligence. As a result, professional associations should be actively involved in curriculum development and review to ensure that the education process produces competent professionals (Moyo 2016). ARA (2021) further state that individual members of the association are given opportunities to enroll onto the Professional development programmes and can qualify for foundations, registered and fellowship status, Bursaries and scholarships. This helps individual growth while at the same time ensuring professional advancement in the records and archives profession

iii. Communication and Advocacy with members

A professional association acts as an advocate for its members and the public through providing representation at key forums that discuss policies. Communication is facilitated through traditional or electronic means. This means the use of newsletters or websites to keep in touch with its members and the community it serves at the time. More so, most associations publish a newsletter to update members on issues and communicate the activities of the executive and committees of the association. Often they publish a journal that provides a forum for in-depth and intellectual treatment of aspects of archival work. Meetings are also an important means of enabling communication among members (UNESCO 1995). In addition, ARA (2020) state that being a member of a professional body means receiving email updates containing news, events, jobs and other member initiatives through tweet news and updates monthly.

In addition to that Cox (1996) state that professional associations enhance a sense of belonging and the capacity of effecting change and representing its members. In addition, the Association of Canadian Archivists (1996) opines that registered records and archives professional associations;

- Effectively promote and advance records and information management as a profession
- Assist records and archives members with professional development
- Maintain and develop further industry and professional standards and records management guidelines while at the same time promote cooperative endeavors with related professional groups
- Develop policies and maintain an advocacy role on records management issues

- Organise and promote programs of research, education, training and networking in the profession.

V. STUDY FINDINGS

Qualification of respondents

The study sought to establish the qualifications of respondents who were involved in the records and archives profession. This was important because it helped establish whether members under study belonged to the records and archives profession or not. Study findings established that the qualifications of respondents differed from;

- Diploma
- Higher National Diploma
- Degree [records and archives management, Library science
- Masters in Library science/records management

Employment status of Respondents

The study also sought to establish careers of respondents under study. Findings established that respondents were from different portfolios within the records and archives profession. They worked in different places which ranged from Polytechnic Colleges, Universities, Banks, registry offices and the private sector. Some were even registered consultants while some were students. Findings are tabulated below;

Sector	Job title
Banking sector	Information clerks
Universities, Polytechnic Colleges [higher education]	Lectures, registry clerks, secretaries, library staff, students
Private sector	Secretaries, messengers and general hands
Museums, Government departments	Registry clerks, officers

Source: Research data 2021

Records and archives professional association that respondents were affiliated to

On the question of which registered records and archives professional association do you subscribe to in Zimbabwe, the results were tabulated below;

Records and archives registered Professional association in Zimbabwe	Unregistered Records and Archives professional association in Zimbabwe	Records and Archives Professional association outside Zimbabwe
Noone	-Zimbabwe Society of Archivists [ZIMSA]. -Zimbabwe Library Association	-Society of South African Archivist [SASA] -Oral History Association of South Africa [OHASA]

Source: Research data 2021

As shown in the table, it was established that there were indeed no registered records and archives professional association in Zimbabwe. This was concurrent with the data that was released by the International Council of Archives (2012) that showed no professional association in Records and archives management in Zimbabwe. The records and archives staff were affiliated to different registered professional associations outside Zimbabwe such as SASA and OHASA.

The understanding of the role of a registered professional association

To gauge the understanding of respondents regarding the role of a professional association, the researcher asked respondents on their understanding of the role of a professional association. Different responses were obtained with most respondents stating the following answers;

“ a professional association acts as the voice that advocates for rights of records and archives professionals and corrects certain anomalies being experienced regarding low remuneration and the employment of non-records people in records management posts” “A registered professional association is important in that it ensures that workshops and seminars are organised by the records and archives people” Another response obtained showed that a professional association ensures the sharing of ideas between like-minded people, who in this case are records and archives professionals.

The above responses showed understanding of the importance of having a records management profession to be the voice of a profession and to set up and monitor standards in a profession while at the same time it is a glue that binds people together on their quest towards the successful management and access of information products. This is in line with sentiments by UNESCO (1995) which show the role of a registered professional association as an information repository and powerhouse of professional expertise from which stakeholders can contain information and direction.

Effects of not having a registered records and archives professional association

On the aspect of what the records and archives profession was missing as a result of not having a records and archives professional association, the following effects were highlighted;

	Effects
1	Lack of bargaining power
2	No representation on records issues in terms of legislation
3	Employment of unqualified personnel in records management posts
4.	Low remuneration as a result of bargaining power
5	Shortage of resources for records and archives professionals

6	Lagging behind in terms of profession’s development as records professionals missed out on meetings to discuss ideas together, conduct workshops and seminars
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Source: Research Data (2021)

Respondents stated the costs and cumbersome tasks of travelling to other countries, especially south Africa, for presentations and workshops year in and out instead of conducting their own local workshops and have renowned records and archives gurus make presentations and share ideas about the profession. Representation on issues of remuneration, working conditions and resources also came up as a result of not having a records and archives management professional association hence it compromised records management activities.

Challenges faced in the registration of a professional association

The study also established that there were several challenges when it comes to creating a professional association and chiefly amongst these were registration challenges, funding and lack of will by the archivists to push forward the agenda of records and archives profession having a registered association. There was also the issue of funding as most information professionals were unable to subscribe. Another notable challenge established was that some records and archives professionals so no need for having professional association. They cited political factors as a factor that rendered professional associations useless. As such there was a feeling of hesitancy and as such having a records and archives association was not going to change much in terms of records management practices, hence the why bother attitude.

The study established that there was an unregistered professional association, Zimbabwe Society of Archives (ZIMSA), which was on the verge of registering. The professional association had over 2000 records and archives professionals who shared views and arranged workshops so that issues can be deliberated on. The study also established that there was another effort to create a professional association which however could not see daylight due to what some said was a result of lack of support from records and archives professionals in the country.

VI. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, records and archives professional association can be said to be the ‘glue’ that binds together information professionals in their bid to discuss, regulate and share ideas which are of paramount importance for growth of the profession.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore recommended that records and archives professionals in Zimbabwe must expedite the registration of the professional association to ensure that they are a recognized force that has a voice with regards to the management of records and archives in Zimbabwe.

Registering the association will be fundamental for the growth of the profession. Besides, it is recommended that there must be a database created to keep names of different records and archives professionals in Zimbabwe.

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