

The Role of Records Management in Enhancing Compliance and Operational Efficiency in Real Estate Management Companies in Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the role of records management in enhancing compliance and operational efficiency in Real Estate Management Companies in Zimbabwe. Records management is very important in the real estate industry to effectively manage their records for compliance and operational efficiency. However, records management in real estate management is not taken seriously resulting in missing vital records, thereby jeopardizing the whole operations. The study focuses on how records management helps real estate companies follow the law and work more efficiently. The study employed a triangulation research method, using questionnaires with both open and closed questions, interviews, cognizance institution discussions and documentary evaluation along with purposive sampling technique where 50 participants with the knowledge of records management and real estate management were chosen to participate in the study. Data was collected through interviews, focus groups, and document reviews of policies and was analysed in themes that emerged from the data collection process. The major finding was that real estate has basic ideas about records management but lacked the professional records management standards and best practices. This resulted in the mismanagement of records in real estate. The study recommends that real estate industry employ qualified records management practitioners to manage real estate records.

Keywords: Compliance, Digital records management, Operational efficiency, Records management, Regulatory requirements, Risk management, Training and awareness

INTRODUCTION

The real estate industry is important for the economy because it helps with investment, city growth, and managing property. In Zimbabwe, the real estate sector is controlled by laws like the Deeds Registries Act, Companies and Other Business Entities Act, and property management rules (Mushonga, 2021). Following these laws requires strong records management. Records are important because they show things like transactions, contracts, ownership, and how money is handled, which is key for both following the law and running the business well (Ngoepe, 2016). Good records management not only helps companies follow the law but also makes decisions easier, manage risk better, and helps customers. However, many real estate companies in Zimbabwe still use old paper-based systems, which can lead to problems like fraud, inefficiency, and not following the rules (Mnjama & Wamukoya, 2007). This paper looks at how good records management can help real estate companies in Zimbabwe follow the law and work more efficiently, with a focus on Bulawayo and Harare.

Background

The ISO 15489-1:2016 definition categorizes records into those generated for compliance purposes or during commercial activities. There exist multiple types of records: tangible items like paper-based documentation such as letters, reports, and books; electronic formats including computer-generated data stored on disks or servers; and auditory visual media encompassing tapes, DVDs, recordings, films, and any combination thereof. The

discipline encompasses managing record-keeping activities effectively and in an organized manner throughout their lifecycle: creation, acquisition, storage, utilization, and eventual disposition. Creating entails crafting and gathering data entries, upkeep includes managing storage, safeguarding, and protecting these documents, utilization pertains to making them accessible for users, while elimination deals with expansion as per set and applicable laws.

Essential documents serve as vital assets in institutions; they must adhere to prudent record-keeping procedures (Mutula & Wamukoya, 2009). Additionally, Shepherd (2010), stated that individuals and organizations create records of their current activities to support management, ensure accountability and culture to meet the needs of society for collective memory and protect the identity of individuals and communities and their histories. Effective records management in commercial real estate involves navigating every legal matter and responsibilities associated with acquiring or disposing of properties. The research conducted by Lee & Kim (2021) suggests an effective solution for maintaining comprehensive control over various aspects of property management through their proposed real estate records management software, which encompasses tasks such as monitoring rental receipts, overseeing tenant interactions, handling lease modifications, executing rent agreements, ensuring property upkeep expenses, and organizing leasing information efficiently. Efficient recordkeeping entails overseeing all stages from creation to disposal according to established procedures (ISO 15489-1: 2016). Precise and readily available documentation helps property supervisors to avoid potential lawsuits, improve strategic planning, and simplify operations. Gage (2024) asserts that thorough documentation is vital for achieving business efficiency, adherence to regulations, and preserving investment worth over time. Effective record-keeping significantly cuts down on property expenses by an estimated 20%, according to research by McKinsey (2023).

Records produced by property firms encompass detailed summaries of every monetary exchange, buying activities, selling events, rent revenue, upkeep expenditures, and various associated charges. Ineffective record-keeping poses significant challenges within this sector; thus, robust document control ensures precise documentation of real estate activities, resident data, upkeep plans, and fiscal entries for reliable operations (Gage, 2024). Inadequate record-keeping may result in monetary deficits, conflicts arising between landlords and residents, as well as reduced income streams (Ombati, 2022). The significance of record-keeping within the realm of property transactions is beyond doubt. As regulations become more intricate and demands increase for clear reporting and responsibility, real estate companies should establish comprehensive record-keeping tools to meet these standards effectively. The adoption of digital record-keeping solutions has surged within sectors due to their multifaceted advantages such as heightened protection against breaches, amplified productivity gains, and stricter adherence to regulations (Dai & Vasarhelyi, 2021).

According to ISO 15489-1:(2016); organizations create, acquire, and maintain records for evidentiary purposes related to statutory requirements or commercial activities. These records exist in diverse formats, tangible items like paper-based documentation such as letters, reports, and books; electronic media including computer-generated data stored on disks, hard drives, and auditory visual assets encompassing tapes, discs, films, slides, video recordings, audiotapes, CDs, DVDs, Blu-rays among others. The discipline of managing these records is characterized by overseeing their production, acquisition, storage, utilization, and eventual elimination in an organized manner. Creating entails crafting and gathering data entries; upkeep includes managing storage, safeguarding, and protecting these documents; utilization pertains to making them accessible for users; while elimination follows by established timeframes set forth by regulations and policies.

Essential documents serve as crucial assets within institutions; they must adhere to effective records handling protocols (Mutula & Wamukoya, 2009). Additionally, according to Shepherd (2010), entities document ongoing actions as part of managing operations, ensuring transparency through accountability measures, fostering societal understanding by preserving communal memories, and safeguarding individual identities and historical narratives. Effective management in commercial real estate involves navigating every legal matter and responsibilities associated with possessing or disposing of the asset. The research conducted by Lee & Kim (2021) suggests that effective real estate record-keeping software is crucial for overseeing every aspect of property administration tasks such as monitoring rental receipts, handling tenant relations, executing lease transfers, negotiating tenancy agreements, maintaining building upkeep expenses, and promoting property listings efficiently.

Research conducted by Mashingaidze (2019) reveals that property management practices in Zimbabwe entail interaction with several governing entities including: Deeds Registry, ZIMRA, Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) and Estate Agents Council. Every instance necessitates distinct documentation types and statistical presentations. Inadequate standardization hampers developers' ability to create cohesive document management solutions. A firm needs distinct records pertaining to ZIMRA reviews, EACZ evaluations, as well as local councils' building checks, including those conducted by the Estate Agents Association in Zimbabwe (The Estate Agents Council of Zimbabwe (2025)).

According to Frank in 2013, maintaining effective record-keeping is crucial for businesses like those involved in property management to ensure legal adherence, reduce potential hazards, and boost productivity. Robust document control facilitates maintaining precise and dependable documents proving adherence to legal standards and regulations as outlined in ISO 15489-1:2016, pinpointing and resolving possible hazards by diligent documentation practices, according to Shepherd & Yeo (2018). Frank (2013) asserts that proficient recordkeeping facilitates streamlined processes such as gathering, evaluating information for insights, and generating reports which aid in making well-informed decisions. Inadequate documentation may result in monetary setbacks, conflicts arising between landlords and residents, and diminished income streams (Ragali, 2023). An investigation conducted by Gambo and Mordecai (2022), focusing on property records administration within estate surveys and valuations in Kaduna, Nigeria, examined various aspects including the nature of record-keeping cultures, obstacles encountered during documentation processes, as well as their impact on real estate activities. Research uncovered certain obstacles in managing real estate documentation, such as difficulties accessing data quickly, insufficient storage capacity for archives, and inadequate understanding regarding record handling procedures. Considering these factors, the objective of the research is to evaluate how effective record-keeping practices can improve adherence to regulations and streamline business operations within the realm of property management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Records Management and Compliance

Records control is important to organizational compliance, as it ensures that companies adhere to criminal, regulatory, and expert necessities (ISO 15489-1, 2016). In the real estate region, compliance entails maintaining accurate belongings ownership statistics, tenant agreements, monetary transactions, and audit trails. Poor records management frequently results in criminal disputes, penalties, or reputational harm (Kemoni, 2009). In line with the world bank/IRMT (2000), it's far hard to look at the rule of thumb of law, display compliance or noncompliance with laws, rules and procedures, and be accountable without reliable, legally verifiable evidence of choices made and movements (statistics) undertaken with the aid of authorities and civil servants inside the provision of services. Touray (2021) said that a report is statistics that exist in diverse forms whether revealed or digital. It is created or acquired based on the sports or transactions that take place in an organization. Therefore, information is stored and preserved to ensure all activities and transactions are recorded and grow to be a strategic useful resource inside destiny. Moreover, the International Standards Organization, [ISO 15489] (2001) defined a record as facts that are created, obtained, and stored as a source of reference for a company and people in carrying out a commercial enterprise and cause.

Abdulrahim et al (2024),) in their study titled on the Application of Records and Information Management Compliance for Quality Service Delivery in the Department of Faculty of Education, Ahmadu Bellow, college, Zaria, Nigeria, they defined compliance in data and statistics management as relating to the adherence to legal guidelines, policies, rules and standards governing the creation, upkeep and disposal of information. They indicated that compliance in records control is crucial for preserving integrity, reliability of information and in the defensive of the rights and privacy of people and entities involved. By ensuring compliance, companies can safeguard sensitive information, avoid unauthorized access, and make sure the accuracy and reliability in their information that are essential for decision making, reporting and audits. According to their study, effective records and information management practices for quality service delivery would entail a well-structured and seamlessly integrated system. The system should feature standardized policies and procedures governing records, clear lines of accountability, and meticulous compliance with regulatory standards. The study recommended that organizations are required to construct their recordkeeping programs in alignment with their internal policies to maintain consistency and compliance. This system must meet regulatory requirements to

make sure that statistics and facts are controlled appropriately inside the felony framework. This gap triggered the researchers to analyze more at the role of information management in dating to compliance and operational efficiency within the real estate industry.

Operational Efficiency and Records

Operational performance is the capacity of an organization to deliver offerings successfully whilst minimizing expenses and risks. In real property control, records provide the basis for efficient property management, rental series, and renovation monitoring (Shepherd & Yeo, 2003). Digital information management systems enhance efficiency via allowing short retrieval of statistics, supporting facts-pushed selections, and decreasing administrative delays (Ngulube, 2012). According to ISO 15489 (2001), records management is a field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposal of records, including the processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records. Records are essential to all organizations. They improve the effectiveness of operations and document services in organizations by enhancing the delivery of services, supporting the administration, documenting the rights and responsibilities of individuals, and capturing evidence of the work in real estate industries (Aziz et, al 2024).

Records Management in Zimbabwe

Mutsagondo, (2019) identified gaps in the implementation of contemporary information control systems in Zimbabwe, specifically in industries including health, education, and real property. Many agencies still depend heavily on guide report-maintaining practices, which disclose information to dangers of loss, misplacement, and unauthorized access. In the health sector Ngulube & Tafor (2006) supported by Mutsagondo (2019) highlighted that inefficient filing systems often delay access to patient information, affecting service delivery and compliance with global health standards. Sibanda (2020) also noted that many institutions face resource constraints, making it difficult to invest in modern information and communication technology systems to support digitization in Zimbabwe. Information control regulations also remain fragmented, with many groups lacking clean recommendations that align with international best practices such as ISO 15489 requirements (Ngoepe, 2016). With persevered funding in ICT infrastructure and ability constructing programs for records workforce in Zimbabwe, there's need to improve compliance and performance throughout key sectors.

Objective

To find out how records management enhances compliance and operational efficiency in real estate management companies in Zimbabwe

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a triangulation research method, using questionnaires with both open and closed questions, interviews, cognizance institution discussions and documentary evaluation. The intention was to generalize findings to a broader populace. This method is particularly beneficial for exploring complicated troubles, gaining nuanced insights, and know-how the experiences and views of individuals, Creswell et, al (2016). The study employed a constructivism studies philosophy, which emphasizes the construction of information via social interactions and experiences Crotty (1998). A case study was used to discover the position of information management in two actual property industries in Zimbabwe, one in Bulawayo and another one in Harare. This layout allowed an in-depth examination of records control practices and their outcomes on compliance and operational effectiveness in real estate industry, Yin (2014). The case study method allowed the researchers to acquire specified insights into records control approaches and challenges in the two actual property groups under observation through imparting wealthy know-how of the phenomenon below research, Stake (1995). The observation made complete insights into the experiences and views of property managers, tenants and actual property administrators concerning the phenomena being studied. Data was collected from 50 members that covered tenants, property managers and actual property directors. In-depth interviews were carried out and questionnaires distributed to accumulate information at the position of records management concerning compliance and operation performance of information within the actual property enterprise. Focus groups discussions with property managers and actual property administrators were administered providing a

possibility for the exploration of shared views at the function of records control in helping compliance and operational performance in the management of the real property commercial enterprise.

Document analysis was additionally conducted to collect extra data from relevant records management document control and policies. The use of document evaluation, focus group discussion and in-depth interviews allowed for an in-intensity analysis of troubles at hand collecting distinct views thereby coming up with triangulation of facts sources. The gathered information was analyzed using thematic information approaches. The analytic approach involved the identification themes, categories and patterns within the data. Data was then organized into meaningful themes to enable the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the role of records management in supporting compliance and operational efficiency in the real estate industry as perceived by participants.

FINDINGS

The table below provides the demographic characteristics of the contributors on these studies. There had been greater males (60%) than females (40%) who participated inside the study. members have been also largely drawn from Harare actual property (53%) than Bulawayo actual property (47%). The greatest range of contributors got here from people who had 6-10 years of service (47%), accompanied with the aid of the ones above 10 years who contributed 33% and the least have been people with less than 5 years of experience in the real estate industry (20%).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	28	56%
	Male	22	44%
Real Estate	Harare	34	68%
	Bulawayo	16	32%
Years of Service	Below 5 years	10	20%
	6–10 years	31	62%
	Above 10 years	9	18%

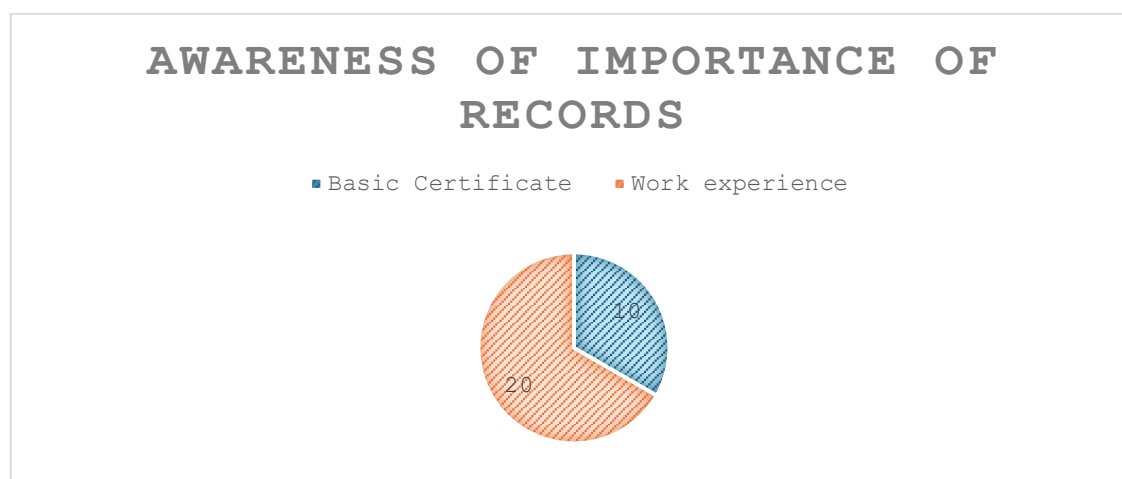
Analysis of the findings on the role of records management

Data was organized by theme and evaluated regularly highlighting the importance of accurate information, the advantages of controlling important data, the challenges in managing data, and strategies for improvement.

Awareness Level

Participants understood records management. 10(33,3%) of the respondents from questionnaire had basic certificate in records management while 20(66,7%) had experience working with records

However, they were familiar with basic practices but lacked professional knowledge.



Importance of accurate records

Participants showed that records are essential for following rules and making decisions.

Some of their comments included:

- *"We emphasized the importance of keeping records accurate and up to date to make sure the company follows the rules."*
- *"Companies should highlight how records help in making business decisions, like managing property and planning finances."*

18(60%) agreed to the fact that keeping records is essential in Real Estate Sector management to make informed decisions while 12(40%) were not sure of the importance of keeping records.

Benefits of records management

Another key theme in the study was the benefits of good records management.

Most participants mentioned positive effects, such as better compliance and more efficient operations.

With proper records management, companies can improve compliance with the rules and reduce the risk of breaking them.

Companies can also increase productivity and efficiency by having well-organized records and smoother processes.

Compliance and operational efficiency

Participants stressed that effective records management helps follow legal and industry rules.

Keeping proper records of leases, property ownership, and financial transactions helps avoid legal problems and makes audits easier. Using digital systems for records saves time, improves communication, and supports decision-making. Respondents reported faster client service and more transparent operations.

Challenges in records management

Participants mentioned several challenges.

These included poor record-keeping systems and a lack of standardization.

Other issues were limited resources, such as budget problems and a lack of trained staff, which made it hard to manage records well.

Strategies for improvement

The final theme from the research focused on strategies to improve records management.

Most participants suggested using digital record-keeping systems and providing training, awareness as well as availability of a records management policy, retention schedule and continuous monitoring and evaluation of records management practices.

We also emphasized the importance of implementing digital record-keeping systems to improve accessibility and efficiency in the day-to-day business.

There is need for training and awareness programs to ensure staff understand the importance of records management and best practices.

Table 2. Strategies for improvement

Strategies	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
Records management policy	18	02	10
Automated Retention schedule	15	7	8
Training and awareness	22	0	8
Monitoring and evaluation	10	14	6

DISCUSSION

The study reviewed that records management plays a crucial role in real estate sector, impacting both operational efficiency and regulatory compliance. In addition, effective recordkeeping ensures that real estate professionals maintain organized, accessible and secure documentation which is essential for various aspects of the business. This was supported by Lee and Kim (2021) who suggested for an effective solution for maintaining comprehensive control of various aspects of property management. Findings confirm the critical role of records management in ensuring compliance and operational efficiency within the property industry. Concurring with Ngoepe (2016), the study confirms that records create a platform for accountability and compliance with the law. The adoption of electronic systems has heightened efficiency as evident with global advancements in e-records management (Ngulube, 2012). The adoption of digital recordkeeping was emphasized by Dai and Vasarhelyi (2021) who stated that the use and adoption of digital systems has surged within sector due to their multifaceted advantages such as heightened protection against breaches, amplified productivity gains and stricter adherence to regulations. Document management systems streamline daily operations by reducing manual tasks and paperwork enabling real estate professionals to quickly access and retrieve necessary documents.

But infrastructure and skill shortages reflect areas of targeted intervention. Industry-specific records management norms are absent, with implications for patchy practices and an indicator of a disconnection between rule and operation (Mutsagondo, 2019). Records Continuum Model was a useful framework, further highlighting the necessity for proactive and continuous records management practices in order to comply and be effective

Digital transformation Challenges in records management in real estate sectors

Though it presents serious challenges for records management (RM), digital transformation in real estate promises increased efficiency, quicker transactions, and better data-driven decision making. In addition to choosing technology, a successful transformation necessitates reconsidering RM policies, metadata, legal admissibility, security, and staff competencies across various stakeholders that include developers, brokers, law firms, registries Al-Haimi (2025). Inadequate integration compromises legal defensibility by resulting in incomplete records, provenance loss, and disrupted retention/disposal workflows.

For the digital transformation of real estate to be reliable and legally defensible, records management is essential. Technical issues like cybersecurity and integration are significant, but organizational tasks like coordinating metadata, bringing stakeholders together, enforcing compliance, and altering user behavior are the most difficult. Real estate companies can lower risk and benefit from the efficiency gains of digitalized RM by implementing structured audits, clear metadata standards, privacy-by-design, and staged migration.

For digital transformation in real estate to be dependable and legally defensible, records management is crucial.

-Organizational tasks are just as difficult as technical ones, such as integration and cybersecurity.

- Risks can be reduced by putting in place structured audits, transparent metadata standards, privacy-by-design, and staged migration.

- For digital transformation to be successful, cooperation between all parties involved, that is developers, brokers, law firms, and registries is essential.

Real estate firms can reap the rewards of greater productivity, speedier transactions, and improved decision-making by giving records management top priority and tackling the difficulties posed by digital transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the important of records management in enhancing compliance and operational efficiency in Zimbabwe's real estate sector. Effective records management systems reduce risks, ensure adherence to legal requirements and improve service delivery. To address the challenges the study recommends:

1. The development of industry-specific records management standards for the real estate sector.
2. Implementing digital records management systems to enhance efficiency.
3. Conducting regular monitoring and audit to remain compliant with regulations
4. Providing continuous employee training for delivering best practices.

By doing so real estate management companies can enhance compliance and operational efficiency, offering sustainable growth and accountability.

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