

Managing digital heritage – an analysis of the education and training curriculum for Africa’s archives and records professionals

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Abstract

The education and training of archives and records professionals in Africa can be traced back several decades. Archives and records practitioners in Africa’s different countries have, over the years, taken varying paths to attain their professional qualifications. A number of publications have offered an analysis of the historical developments. This paper outlines progress on an ongoing study by InterPARES Trust¹ Africa Team that examines the curricula in different African educational institutions and investigates the extent to which they address the increasingly complex environment that includes the management of digital records in networked environments. It is hoped that the study will inform curriculum development and review in the area of digital records at the institutions of higher learning in Africa.

Key words: archives and records management, digital records, education, training, curriculum development, Africa

1. Introduction and background to the problem

Effective management of records is fundamental to the efficient running of bureaucracies. Recent studies in the management of records within the public sector in Africa reveal various challenges whether one is dealing with demonstrating accountability in the auditing process (Ngoepe, 2013) or the provision of health services (Katu, 2015c). While digital records offer the opportunities of multiple access, instant transmission and efficient retrieval using multiple search criteria, they have not always been effectively managed.

Several commentators note that South Africa is the most advanced African country in the implementation of software applications to manage digital records (Keakopa, 2010, Kemoni,

¹ InterPARES Trust is a project aimed to “generate the theoretical and methodological frameworks that will support the development of integrated and consistent local, national and international networks of policies, procedures, regulations, standards and legislation concerning digital records entrusted to the Internet, to ensure public trust grounded on evidence of good governance, a strong digital economy, and a persistent digital memory”. The Project is coordinated by the University of British Columbia. More information on InterPARES can be accessed on the website www.interpares.org

2009). A survey of South African institutions aimed at investigating their experiences in implementing Enterprise Content Management (ECM) applications revealed that more than 40% of the institutions had five or more years of practical experience in ECM implementation (Katu, 2012, p. 48-49). However, an assessment of the maturity level in ECM implementation suggests that there is room for improvement (Katu, 2015a). The situation of digital records deemed archival also raises concern since studies show that the national archival system is plagued by poor infrastructure and the lack of capacity to ingest any digital records for permanent preservation (Ngoepe and Keakopa, 2011, *The Archival Platform*, 2015, p. 102). Beside infrastructure, another factor contributing to challenge of managing and preserving electronic records in Africa is cited as lack of skills. This is compounded by the fact that very few universities in Africa offer qualifications in archives and records management. For example, Ngoepe, Maluleka and Onyancha (2014) report that in South Africa, out of 25 universities, 10 offer courses in library and information science, and out of those 10 only three offer qualifications in archives and records management. The curricula of these universities do not comprehensively embrace digital records as compared to the universities in the global hub such as Canada and Australia. Therefore, there is a need to address the lack of capacity in digital records management through aligned curriculum development.

2. Addressing the challenges of lack of capacity

Africa's archives and records professionals are expected to be adept at managing digital records. Studies conducted since the early 2000s have shown that there are gaps in addressing this lack of capacity (Department of Arts and Culture [South Africa], 2010, Mutiti, 2002, Wamukoya and Mutula, 2005, Wato, 2006). A key component in addressing this capacity deficit would be through the education and training programmes in place throughout the African continent. There was been a tendency in the past to address the education and training challenges of the continent through regional initiatives such as the two centres established in Ghana and Senegal in the early 1970s. However, due to financial and logistical reasons these initiatives didn't last more than a decade, giving way to national programmes which continue to provide support for current professionals (Katu, 2015b).

Another effort in capacity building geared towards professionals in developing countries was by the International Records Management Trust with three main categories of educational material focused mainly at the Eastern and Southern Africa region:

- Route maps for moving from a paper-based to an electronic information environment including:
 - Designing a Records Management Improvement Programme(International Records Management Trust, 2009a)
 - Implementing Electronic Records Management(International Records Management Trust, 2009b)
 - Integrating Records Management in the Systems Development Life Cycle (International Records Management Trust, 2009d)
- Good practice indicators to measure records management integration in ICT control systems (International Records Management Trust, 2009c).
- Five training modules on the management of records in electronic form:
 - Module 1 - Understanding the Context of Electronic Records Management (Keakopa et al., 2009)
 - Module 2 - Planning and Managing an Electronic Records Management Programme (Arderm et al., 2009)
 - Module 3 - Managing the Creation, Use and Disposal of Electronic Records (Goh et al., 2009)
 - Module 4 - Preserving Electronic Records (Brown et al., 2009)
 - Module 5 - Managing Personnel Records in an Electronic Environment (Griffin and Hoyle, 2009)

Some of these training resources were developed in conjunction with African scholars with the aim of addressing local realities. However, there is a need for systematic assessment on the extent of the positive contribution such resources have made on research and professional development capacity in the African continent. This is because merely preparing and making training resources available, even if freely, does not automatically translate into quality improvements in education and training. Such resources have to be developed in full cognisance of local needs and, for them to continue being relevant to the intended audience, also be rooted in local or national initiatives. One such initiative, but one that has not yet been achieved, is a centre of excellence for digital records management that has been mooted for a number of years for the East African region (Lowry, 2013).

3. Research process

Two intertwined issues emerge from the foregoing, first there has not been an in-depth analysis on the curriculum offered in the national programmes with the exception of a few countries particularly in Southern Africa (Department of Arts and Culture [South Africa], 2010,

Nengomasha, 2006). As demonstrated in the case of universities in Kenya, almost 70% of its existing universities were accredited between 2011 and 2014 which is good in expanding educational opportunities but raises concerns on the quality of education and training being offered (Katuu, 2015b). Second, there has been a call to increase the visibility of African scholars within global professional research initiatives. While an argument may be made that African professionals have been exposed to international developments, it may be that their own informed contributions have been hampered by the lack of constant and long exposure that can be made possible through research activities at a global level (Onyango, 2000). The question of whether African scholars should contribute to the overall research agenda within the profession around the world has been asked at different points in the past (Katuu, 2006, Kemoni, 2009). Fundamentally, this should emanate from a determination by individual academic institutions within the continent to identify appropriate avenues for global collaboration. For instance, since 2013 the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa has been coordinating the contributions of Team Africa that is part of the InterPARES Trust research project (InterPARES Trust, 2014b). Overall InterPARES Trust is exploring issues concerning digital records and data entrusted to the Internet with the goal of generating theoretical and methodological frameworks to develop a variety of instruments that ensure “public trust grounded on evidence of good governance, a strong digital economy, and a persistent digital memory.”(InterPARES Trust, 2014a). One of the case studies undertaken by Team Africa is entitled *Curriculum Alignments at Institutions of Higher Learning in Africa: Preparing Professionals to Manage Records Created in Networked Environments*. It is envisaged to be a systematic analysis of the curricula in different educational institutions in Africa and investigates the extent to which they address the changing environment. It will be carried out in four phases.

- The first phase is a review of literature examining published sources with a view to learning from what has taken place both within individual countries as well as at a regional or even continent-wide basis.
- The second phase is a survey of education and training institutions within the continent in order to identify all possible programmes that offer formal opportunities for archives and records professionals.
- The third phase is the assessment of curricula of select institutions representing different regional or programmatic flavours. The assessment will be looking at the extent to which the curricula address modern challenges.
- The fourth phase will be a tracer study of select graduates from programmes in order to assess the extent to which their working environment reflects their educational and training background.

The objective of the project is to identify the gaps that exist and suggest ways of filling those gaps, cognizant of the fact that different nations require specific interventions rather than the usual one-size-fit-all approach.

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