

ESARBICA NEWSLETTER

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Editorial

The XXI ESARBICA conference in Maputo is just around the corner. Let us all seize the opportunity to be part of the event and interact with archivists from all corners of the world. Everything is ready for the big event and we appeal to you to grace the occasion with your presence. Despite the looming XXI ESARBICA biennial conference in Maputo in June, we are still struggling to get contributions to the newsletter from the members.

Nonetheless, in this issue we have managed to solicit three articles and a poem. This issue opens with a thought provoking article by Mpho Ngoepe on the marginalisation of archives and records management to the periphery of the public sector in South Africa. On 14-15 April 2011, the Swaziland National Archives hosted a disaster preparedness workshop facilitated by Prof. Patrick Ngulube of the University of South Africa. Mr Nqoba Msibi takes us through what transpired at the workshop, as well as the formation of the National Committee of the Blue Shield in Swaziland.

Many organisations struggle to develop and implement a file plan. Mr Jonathan Mukwevho shares with us lessons learnt on the implementation of a file plan at the Auditor-General of South Africa. On creative writing, Mr Mpho Ngoepe provides a poem on ESARBICA.

To sustain ESARBICA newsletter, we need your active participation through submission of articles, case studies in archives, records management and oral history. Future contributions to the newsletter can be forwarded to Mr Mpho Ngoepe at mphongoepe@tsamail.co.za or Prof. Patrick Ngulube at ngulup@unisa.ac.za. The editors would like to thank the contributors for this issue.

Editors
Mpho Ngoepe and Patrick Ngulube

EDITORS



Mr Mpho Ngoepe



Prof. Patrick Ngulube

Is archives and records management profession in South Africa cursed?

Mpho Ngoepe
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I would like to kick-off the article by asking an itching question. Is the archives and records management profession in South Africa cursed? If yes, up to how many generations? I just hope it is not up to the third or fourth generation as the holy book says (even though I don't know which generation I belong to). If indeed cursed, can the current archivists and records managers in South Africa break the cycle? The answer is simple and sobering. I doubt it. A new generation of archivists in South Africa has emerged that has no knowledge of being activists.

Few years ago, Harris (2007:3) one of archival divas in South Africa, lamented that the archival profession is in trouble because archivists have stopped being activists. The same year, Abbot (2007:7) also complained that in his vast experience as a records management consultant in South Africa, he has never seen a records management programme that is both "compliant" and effectively supporting decision-making in the public sector. In the words of Abbot (2007:7), one can either have a "compliant" records management programme or one that effectively supports decision-making, not both. Katuu (2007) also questioned whether the archives and records management profession in South Africa is at crossroad or has reached a cul-de-sac. After reading the papers of the aforementioned luminaries, I did introspection and came to the conclusion that indeed the archives and records management profession in South Africa is in trouble or may be cursed.

There are a number of realities to support the above premises. Firstly, many if not all records managers in South Africa are only involved with the management of records when the records are in semi-current or non-current phase. In other words, records and archives managers are not involved at all stages of the records life-cycle. It is only when unclassified records are transferred in boxes from various business units within organisations to central storage that records managers are involved. Then, the records are either no longer needed in the respective business unit or the custodian or creator of the records has resigned. On the other hand, archivists are not involved whatsoever. This results in unmanageable proportion of backlog of unclassified records. If records are not managed properly in the office of origin; the product transferred to the archives repository will also be poor and this will compromise the history of the nation as records would not be easily retrievable as the principle of *respect des fond* applies at the archives repository. Partly, the problem can be attributed to the fact that systems dictate how we should manage records instead of the other way round. Records management processes in most governmental bodies in South Africa are not mapped (Ngoepe & Van der Walt 2010:84). Whether centralising or decentralising, the ideal situation is that records management function and archives must have full control of all records from the cradle to the grave.

The second concern related to the above dilemma is that some records (e.g. financial records, personnel records, electronic records and others) usually fall outside the jurisdiction of the governmental body's records manager. As a result, these records are not managed or controlled adequately. Failure to manage records can lead to the build-up of unwanted records, overcrowding and disorganisation. As the Library and Archives Canada (2006) would concur, operating this way is high risk, for example,

- If a record cannot be found, it cannot be used or preserved
- If a record is hard to find, it costs more to retrieve
- If a record is kept beyond its useful life, storing it is unnecessary expense

Thirdly, on 5 March 2010, the South African government introduced the Protection of Information Bill to parliament and the introduction triggered mass-based civil society action that according to pundits has not been seen since the dying days of Apartheid. There was much furore about the Bill that continued into 2011. Politicians, journalists and advocacy groups made noises and submissions to parliament regarding the Bill. However, archivists and records managers were conspicuous in their absence during the debate as if the Bill does not concern them. Only a handful of archivists made submissions. Archivists and records managers did not even seize the opportunity provided by the media to market the profession. Instead, they waited for politicians and journalists to cover stories that trespassed on their territories. By raising archival issues and becoming activists, the position of archives and records management in the public domain would be strengthened. As a result, archivists and records managers would be less vulnerable when they have to justify their existence to society or reviewing their budgets (Ngoepe & Ngulube 2009).

As one pundit argues, the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (NARS) is hampered by red tape and lack of funds. It is so dreadfully under-resourced and politically hamstrung that it can barely perform the simplest of its mandated duties. For example, just engage records managers who requested a disposal authority from the NARS, and they would tell you that they have waited for more than two years to be issued a disposal authority. Ask the records managers when last did the NARS conduct inspections in their organisations. What have we done about the situation as archival associations, records managers, and archivist? Zilch and Zippo - it does not concern us.

The less said about the provincial archives services the better. In Limpopo province, for example, an archives repository was built but could not be handed over to the provincial archivist. I don't even think the archival community is aware of the situation.

The situation is compounded by archival associations and professionals not working together in an integrated way. The associations are fragmented and pulling to different directions, e.g. SASA, SARMAF, archival platform, corporate archives forum, provincial forums, not speaking in one voice. United we stand, divided we fall. Who is going to take us serious if we are polarised? Nobody! As Harris (2007:7) would attest, so many of us are stretched to the limit, juggling many balls in the air with the challenges of daily work, leaving us with very little energy for related and tangential pursuits of archival associations. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find members with the energy for conference organisation, administration, advocacy, contributing literature and the editing of publications (Harris 2007: 7).

With regard to career progression in the field, the situation is even more unfavourable. The upward mobility of archivists and records managers through the corporate ladder in most governmental bodies is curtailed to middle management. In consideration of government hierarchy and bureaucracy, this level is low, as an official at that level does not have the authority to interact with top management. Therefore, it is possible that the archives and records management function will very likely not be well represented when key decisions are made in strategic meetings of governmental bodies (Ngoepe & Van der Walt 2010:88). Hence, Venter (2008) questioned whether archives and records management is a profession. She argued that once a person becomes a records manager, he/she has reached the ceiling. The only way to move is horizontally, resulting in records managers of governmental bodies hopping from one organisation to another on the same level. In few instances, if you are lucky, you can become a senior manager responsible for records management. This challenge is compounded by the fact that in South Africa, everybody can become a records manager (as long as you have a relevant qualification). The profession is not regulated like others such as nursing, auditors, doctors, lawyers, etc.

With regard to technology the situation is more appalling. Even with the opportunity afforded by technology we do not seize the opportunity to develop our gallant profession. Instead, we are in the backseat waiting for IT to drive us. The country does not even have infrastructure to harvest electronic records into archival custody. What will happen to records of archival value created electronically today? In the long run, these records would be nowhere to be found. And there will be gaps in our history.

A call to archivists and records managers out there - Is there a light at the end of this dark tunnel? If there is a light, I hope it is not of the oncoming train to trash the profession. Will the phoenix rise from the ashes? Perhaps we are using a gun to kill a fly. Perhaps we are divorcing before getting married. Perhaps we are waiting for Moses to take us out of this bondage. Or maybe we should just go with the flow and hope that only the future will tell if our noble profession in South Africa becomes a dolphin or dinosaur. Perhaps we are jinxed. Indeed, things are falling apart! Cry the beloved profession!

The list of concern can go on and on, e.g. relegation of disruptive

employees or poor performers to records management units, lack of top management support, etc. However, I believe all is not lost, with all this; perhaps the new archivists and archival students must be inspired as Ketelaar (2000:332) reckons. They must be taught to think as professionals rather than to learn how to practice a craft (Ketelaar 2000:332). It is our duty as archivists to be activists and preach to our colleagues working in the field that the battle may be won. However, without working together, we will lose the war of saving the profession and our noble profession will end up being a dinosaur.

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A disaster preparedness workshop by the Swaziland National Archives

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Let me start by expressing my concern about how the Archives and Records Management profession is perceived by many African countries and beyond. It is amazing how it has not been given the recognition it deserves, yet no activity can be effectively executed in any organization without the influence of proper records management practices.

I wonder if it ever crosses the minds of individuals, chief executive officers of organizations, controlling officers of government department even the heads of governments what implications would come with the loss of the memory of their organizations, government departments and consequently the loss of memory of the nations.

No one may know the fateful day when a disaster may strike or the extent of damage it may cause, but it is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that we are prepared and ready to mitigate its effects in an event it occurs.

The Swaziland National Archives successfully conducted a Disaster Preparedness Workshop on the 14th -15th April 2011. The workshop which was held at the Swaziland National Archives in Lobamba, Swaziland attracted many records practitioners from various sectors of government and the private sector. The workshop was facilitated by Professor Patrick Ngulube from the University of South Africa (Unisa). Professor Ngulube is a renowned name in the area of records preservation and conservation.

The Aims and Objectives of the Disaster Preparedness Workshop were to:

- develop the skills and knowledge of information and knowledge management professions in disaster mitigation and recovery.
- make participants to reflect on and strengthen their capacity in strategic and practical aspects of disaster preparedness and recovery.
- enable participant to mitigate the effects of disasters.

Professor Ngulube treated various subjects on Disaster Preparedness. These included;

- Challenges facing information Professionals in Africa in the context of disasters.
- Sharing information on the extent of damage caused in terms of humane and material loss of all major disasters occurring

- across the globe,
- The value of effective Disaster Management and the need of disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness plan in the work environment,
- Conceptual framework of disasters and disaster management: understanding hazards, the local context, risk and vulnerability profile, disaster management cycle, the relief, recovery, rehabilitation, preparedness, mitigation and prevention in disaster management,
- Security of documents
- Ethical issues and standards in disaster management,
- Risk Management
- Writing Disaster Plans
- Compiling disaster planning check list.

To make the workshop effective and collaborative, there were group work sessions in between. During these sessions participants were given an opportunity to share their experiences concerning disasters in their various work environments. Group members were required to jointly develop disaster plans considering the different elements/phases of a Disaster Preparedness Plan (DPP).

It is our hope that participants representing various organizations will implement the knowledge gained from this informative workshop and develop a Disaster Preparedness Plan which should be implemented and reviewed every two years. In his opening speech, the principal secretary expressed his desire to have a sequel workshop and many more organizations attending.

Way forward

Now that the Swaziland National Archives has taken the first step in organizing the DPP workshop, it was agreed that as a way forward the National Committee of the Blue Shield should be formulated. The Swaziland National Archives will take the lead in spearheading this initiative.

The blue shield is the cultural equivalence of the Red Cross. It is the protective emblem specified in the 1954 Hague (Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict) for marking cultural sites to give them protection from attack in the event of armed conflict. The Blue Shield consists of organizations dealing with Museums, Archives and Audio Visual supports, Libraries as well as Monuments and sites.

A resolution drafted during the annual general meeting of International Council on Archives (ICA) in Curacao on 24 November 2006, recommended that members of the ICA should establish a National Committee for the Blue Shield in the countries in order to protect the cultural heritage incase of armed conflict or natural disaster, if one has not been established (www.ifla.org/blueshield).

It is on the premise of this resolution that the National Archives will endeavor to form this National Committee for the Blue Shield which will amongst other things raise awareness on issues of Disaster Preparedness.



The Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Information Communications and Technology Mr. N.H. Mahluza, officially opening the Disaster Preparedness workshop on the 14th April 2011



The Conservator of the Swaziland National Archives Mr. Nqoba Msibi was the Program Director of the workshop.



Prof. Patrick Ngulube facilitating during the workshop.



The Director of the Swaziland National Archives Mrs. Kholekile Mthethwa making her remarks during the official opening.



Participant attentively listening during the workshop.

File plan implementation: Lessons from the Auditor-General of South Africa

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Governmental bodies that fall under the auspices of the National Archives and Records Services of South Africa Act, 1996 (Act No. 43 of 1996) are required to design and implement a classification system (file plan and records control schedule) approved by the national archivist. According to Abbot (2007) many governmental bodies in South Africa struggle to develop and implement file plans. The purpose of this article is to provide a tip of the ice-berg on lessons learnt in the implementation of the file plan within the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA).

As the Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) of South Africa, the AGSA is required to lead by example in all areas of governance. The implementation of a proper records management system is no exception. In 2006, the AGSA conducted a records management audit which culminated in the development of a records management strategy. One of the milestones in the strategy as informed by the NARS Act was the development, implementation and maintenance of the file plan. In other words, the strategy provided a framework according to which a records management policy, procedure and file plan could be developed.

As a result, a functional subject file plan as advocated by the NARS was developed and subsequently approved by the national archivist in 2007. Prior to the implementation of approved AGSA file plan, a communication plan with clear responsibilities and timelines was prepared and approved internally to encourage full participation in the implementation of the plan, among other things. As well, a series of meeting was held with the relevant stakeholders in order to engage them on the importance of records management programme and how they fit in. The meetings were followed by a series of records management training sessions to users of records, such as project administrators and knowledge representatives within AGSA. One of the training sessions was graced by the presence of officials from the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa.

It is worth noting that the training sessions were not outsourced but facilitated by the then records manager, Mr Mpho Ngoepe. This also ensured succession planning when his contract expired.

Implementation of a file plan requires all previous files to be closed and new files to be opened (Queensland Public Authorities 2008; National Archive of South Africa 2007:119). It means that people who open files should start doing so in accordance with the organisation's new file plan. However, in practice this is not an easy task. People are often slow to make changes. According to Bedford and Morella (2006:172), many users have little interest in changing the way they work. This is the challenge we also experienced at the AGSA. For instance, allocating correct reference numbers and registering the files opened posed a challenge. This happened despite staff members having been trained on the file plan.

However, this was countered by designating an official in each business unit as sub-records manager as per the AGSA's records management policy. This is in line with what Morelli (2007:30) refers to as internal champions who are competent enough to understand functional filing so that they can explain to others. In addition, each business unit was assigned a records management staff member to assist them. In other words, records management staff members were deployed to various business units to assist in implementation. This supplemented what Bedford and Morelli (2006:173) referred to as floor walking following the training sessions, i.e. to be available on site to help those responsible for opening files. We also communicated the implementation through publishing articles in the internal newsletter. Lastly, the records management staff customized and adapted the organisational file plan to the needs of business units to make it easier for users to locate and allocate correct reference number when opening and registering file. .

All these were possible because of the support the records management staff received from senior management and guidance from the Records Manager. This support is what Morelli (2007:30) refers to as management sponsorship, i.e. sufficient "enlightened" support for functional filing from within the senior management team. This project was a learning curve to some of us, especially during the implementation stage of the classification system (file plan) within the AGSA. As a result, a number of lessons were learnt from the

Firstly, we learnt that change management, especially training and consultation, remains a significant dimension when implementing a file plan. Queensland Public Authorities (2008) emphasize that implementing a file plan requires change management strategy which includes consultation with stakeholders and staff training. It means training users and helping them to adjust to new filing practices (Morelli 2007:30).

Secondly, we learnt that as records management specialists and practitioners the onus is on us to lead the way. It means we need to enforce the organisational records management programme vigorously, which could be done with little or no support from top management. This is significant if we need support from the top management and shows how passionate we are about the profession and its impact on the bigger picture of the organisation, as well as compliance with the necessary legislative framework governing records management practices. What I'm trying to say is that by doing the right thing from the outset, we can enhance our chances to get the necessary support from top management. This, I think, will help address the problem many of my colleagues and I encounter at our professional gatherings, namely the lack of support from top management. We, therefore, have to set the standard for ourselves and maintain it going forward.

Lastly, we learned that inviting users, especially as representatives from their respective departments/division or business unit, to some of our professional gatherings could go a long way towards changing their mindset. What we have done at the AGSA was to invite these users to our records management seminars. The idea was to help them understand the profession and what is expected of them as record creators, bearing in mind that while they are not records management professionals, they have a role to play to make it work for the organisation in particular and for South Africa as a whole. I can confidently say that they came out as different persons.

To conclude, it is clear that training of users and senior management staff support are indispensable if one has to implement a file plan successfully within an organisation.

In addition to above identified key aspects to successful implementation of the file plan, the following aspects could be useful depending on the type and size of an organisation and the extent of the

challenge:

- Involving users in the design and maintenance of a functional subject file plan often leads to more successful implementation (Morelli 2007:29).
- Establishment of an internal records management forum, which includes relevant stakeholders.
- Constant and consistent communication.
- Regular control and monitoring.
- Having records management as an agenda item at staff or centre meetings at some stage could go a long way towards ensuring successful implementation.

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ESARBICA By Mpho Ngoepe

From eastern to southern Africa
Regional archives had a blurring vision
The apparition not aligned to ICA mission
As regional archival eyesight deteriorates
Archivists put on ESARBICA 3D glasses
For curators were in their own classes
Listening to the dawn chorus in the hive
That heralded the new dawn for archive

In the terrain of eastern and southern Africa
Activists heard the dawning of new archival era
Archival divas and luminaries danced to ESARBICA tune
The song adjusted to ICA melody in the month of June
Providing a forum for archivists to exchange professional ideas
For the advancement of archival regional cooperation ideal
ESARBICA, a new name for archives was born
The fountain from which archivists yearn . . .

In eastern and southern Africa
When it is time for ESARBICA season
Archivists celebrate for a reason
Attending ESARBICA conference to find out
What it means to go life-cycle
And perpetuate the continuum model
In order to respect the creator of records
Culminating into level of arrangements and description

From eastern to southern Africa
In the dichotomy of developing world
Archivists have made and marked their way
By embedding the memory line on the rock
And digitising the non-digital records
Providing the memory to the nations
Nations from eastern and southern Africa
Under ESARBICA, lieux de mémoire

On a lighter note: Blonde filing system

Two secretaries were talking about their work. "I hate filing," said one. "No matter how careful I am, I can never find the papers I'm looking for. I forget where I have filed them."

"I used to have that problem too, but no more," her blonde friend said. "Now I make 26 copies of everything I type and file one under each letter of the alphabet. That way, I can't miss it!"

Source: http://www.askmen.com/daily/jokes/2009_feb/feb08.html

What are the A, B, C's of records management?

- A - Keep what must be kept
- B - Shred what may be shredded
- C - Understand the difference between A and B.

Source:

<http://walrus.wr.usgs.gov/infobank/programs/html/training/recordsmanagement/rmhumor.html>

Coming Events

XXI ESARBICA Conference

Host: National Archives of Mozambique, Maputo

Date: 06-10 June 2011

www.esarbica.org