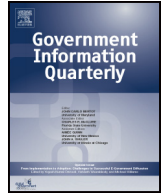




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Government Information Quarterly

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/govinf

Records professionals' challenges and barriers in public institutions in Korea[☆]

Hae-young Rieh

Graduate School of Records, Archives, and Information Science, Myongji University, 34 Geobukgol-ro, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul 03674, Republic of Korea

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 December 2015
Received in revised form 2 August 2016
Accepted 7 August 2016
Available online xxx

Keywords:

Public records management
Records professionals
Public institutions
Korea

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the work practices of records professionals are driven and influenced by national regulations and policies, especially when the public records management system is established over a short period of time. This study focused on the perceived work tasks and practices along with professional development opportunities among Korean records professionals who work in public institutions. Korean records professionals face unique challenges because public institutions in Korea hire records professionals not because of internal needs but because of the law that mandates hiring at least one records professional at each public institution; no records can be discarded without the permission of the records professional. Interviews were conducted to better understand records professionals' perceptions, challenges, and experiences on their own terms. The results reveal that records professionals who participated in this study practice in an isolated environment and are prone to develop narrow understandings of their profession. The majority were concerned about poor recognition of their role in serving their organization and the public. There was a great need for professional development to help them enhance their awareness of the breadth and diversity of their contributions to the public beyond their day-to-day functions. This article concludes by discussing possible solutions and strategies for improving work practices that provide insights and show the practical implications for records professionals' workplaces in other countries and beyond the Korean public organizational context.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

It is widely known that each country's cultural and historical backgrounds are closely connected to the ways in which public records management systems have developed and been maintained. What's less well known is to what extent the work practices of records professionals are deeply rooted in and influenced by national and regional governments' policies, regulations, and laws. This study began with the assumption that compared to other information professionals, such as librarians, records professionals may have less autonomy in terms of work tasks, responsibilities, and priorities in their workplaces because their work tends to be strongly driven by various levels of national and organizational policies and regulations. This study examined records professionals' primary work tasks and resources, along with the unique challenges and barriers they face. The study also investigated how records professionals pursue their professional development.

The study focused on records professionals working in public institutions in Korea because of four distinct characteristics of Korean records professionals and their work settings. First, the public records management system in Korea was set up less than 20 years ago through

enactment of the Public Records Management Act, which mandates hiring at least one records professional with a master's degree or with one year of post-baccalaureate education plus passing exam for each public institution. Second, this law, enacted in 1999, stipulates that no records can be discarded without the permission of the records professional and a professional evaluation committee. Third, records professionals have been hired in these organizations because of the requirements of the law rather than because of the internal needs of each institution. Fourth, as a result, each public institution ended up hiring just one records professional, whose primary work task tends to focus on discarding public records, which may not be what records professionals would prioritize as their primary work task.

The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to examine the challenges and issues that Korean records professionals encounter, given unique work contexts, and (b) to discuss possible solutions and strategies for improving their work practices that can be shared with other records professionals who experience similar challenges in their workplaces beyond the Korean public organizational context. Identifying unique challenges faced by records professionals in Korea could be of interest to records professionals and policy makers in other countries, especially where the public record management system tends to barely function (World Bank and International Records Management Trust, 2000).

[☆] This work was supported by 2013 Research Fund of Myongji University.
E-mail address: hyrieh@mju.ac.kr.

There are just a handful of studies that have investigated public records management or that have recorded professionals' work practices outside North America. For instance, several studies have focused on African countries with respect to the problems of badly managed public records (Kemoni, Ngulube, & Stilwell, 2007; Kirkwood, 2002; Maidabino, 2010; Ngulube & Tafor, 2006). A couple of previous studies were concerned with the development of management of presidential records in Korea (Lee, 2006) or with the government's electronic record management system in Korea (Lee & Lee, 2009). However, there has been little research that addresses the issues that records professionals face with respect to governmental policies and regulations. This became the direct motivation for this study.

The objectives of this study were as follows:

First, it intended to investigate the work tasks that the records professionals in public institutions consider highly important. It is presumed that there may be gaps between what records professionals perceive to be primary work tasks and what regulations have determined to be primary tasks that records professionals must perform.

Second, it investigated the types of information resources frequently requested by inside and outside users of the public institutions along with service methods used to provide such resources. While Tucker (2006) stated that family historians (or genealogists) comprise between 50% and 90% of users within North American and British archives and special collections of libraries and that the users could look for heritage and archive resources related to their research, it was thought that the users of records centers in public institutions of Korea could have distinct information needs in terms of records requested and services that they prefer.

Third, this study aimed to identify the kinds of sources and channels professionals use when they seek work-related advice. The author is particularly concerned with those sole professionals who do not have other colleagues with whom to interact in their organization and thus have no superiors to consult on records management work.

Fourth, the study also examined the difficulties and challenges records professionals in public institutions face in their work practices in general. Based on the findings, possible solutions to resolve related problems are suggested.

Based on these objectives, the following four research questions are addressed.

1. What do the records professionals in public institutions perceive as their primary work tasks?
2. What kinds of records are most frequently requested by users in public institutions?
3. What types of resources do the professionals use to obtain work-related advice, and how do they pursue their professional development?
4. What are the difficulties records professionals in public institutions experience in terms of providing information services to the public as well as performing records management work?

In order to address these four research questions, interviews were selected as a suitable research method. Interviews enable the researcher to understand participants' work practices in their own words rather than bringing predetermined factors or variables to the research design.

The findings of this study offer insights into how records professionals establish a balance between their preferred professional work practices and what has been determined by regulations and policy across both national and organizational levels. The study findings suggest two possible directions to pursue in the future. One direction is to formulate policies and regulations on public records management at the organizational level that reflect current best practices and preferred work practices reported by records professionals. The other direction is to develop more diverse opportunities for professional development that can be adopted in various professional communities across different countries.

2. Literature review

The importance of good public records management and the core role of records professionals and archivists have been pointed out in various studies, including those of Raymond and O'Toole (1978), Cox and Wallace (2002), Cunningham and Philips (2005), Procter, Cook, and Williams (2005), Jimerson (2007), and Duff, Flinn, Suurtamm, and Wallace (2013). For instance, Raymond and O'Toole (1978) identified the problem of poor public records management status and discussed the benefits of efficiency created by good record keeping. The benefits include archivists' increased knowledge of administrative activities, administrators' access to needed information, and accountability of public officials to the people. Cunningham and Philips (2005) also emphasized the importance of public archives and the vital role of archivists, suggesting that archivists need to support transparent and accountable governance and should explore innovative strategies to ensure the long-term preservation of documentary heritages for future generations. Drawing on various historical examples, Jimerson (2007) underlined that records professionals need to be aware of their power within historical and social contexts, by pointing to instances in which historical faults of governments were revealed and those responsible were brought to justice thanks to public records. Duff et al. (2013) identified the actual impact of archives on social justice and tried to develop a model demonstrating the potential of this relationship.

Several studies conducted in the African region and other parts of the world have shown that the public records management systems have been directed by national or regional governments, and they examined the current status in this context. Kirkwood (2002) reviewed the laws governing access to archives and public records in South Africa, with a focus on the implications of the Promotion of Access to Information Act. The author claimed that access to public records in South Africa has been greatly affected by the introduction of the National Archives of South Africa Act (no. 43 of 1996), and the Promotion of Access to Information Act (no. 2 of 2000).

Ngulube and Tafor (2006) conducted a cross-sectional study between 2004 and 2005 on public records and archives management, which covered archival institutions within the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) region. Interviews, content analysis of documents, and self-administered questionnaires were used to obtain data from the 13 member states that make up ESARBICA. The study found out that the national archives within ESARBICA had poor resources for records management, records professionals were not well trained, electronic records were managed inadequately and were in danger of loss, and legislation and standards on records management were not comprehensive enough in the region. Maidabino (2010) examined five public archival institutions in the northwestern states of Nigeria via survey, states where all the institutions have administrative, historical, judicial, legislative, security, and internal records, and emphasized again the importance of their accessibility to the public.

Shepherd (2006) examined the status of public bodies' compliance with the UK Freedom of Information Act and concluded that the claimed compliance with the Records Management Code did not guarantee good records management. Thus, not only legislation but also internal and external standards and the code of practice on the creation and maintenance of records should be followed to meet the expectations of a wider community for accountability.

Lee (2006) described the process of setting up the public records management system in Korea with a special focus on the presidential records management system, which transformed the governmental records management system into a more open model that led to wider disclosure of information. The Korean government's electronic records management system (ERMS) was also made mandatory in most government institutions (Lee & Lee, 2009). The authors pointed out some deficiencies of the new records management system and suggested possible recommendations. Although both studies examined the Korean

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5110679>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5110679>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)