


## Chapter 26

# Assessing Electronic Records Management Systems at South African Universities

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Development and implementation of electronic records management system (ERMS) require the university to develop a strategy that is aligned to a records management programme. Successful implementation of electronic records management systems requires top management support through finance allocations, appointment of skilled personnel, collaboration of internal and external stakeholders, capacity development, and information communication technology infrastructure. When the researcher assessed South African universities with records to adoption of ERMS, it was found that most of the universities adopted effective and efficient records management systems.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter assesses the electronic records management system (ERMS) at South African universities, with a special focus on the electronic records management strategy, executive management support, Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure, capacity development, and collaboration as an enabler to the development and implements ERMS system. The ERMS was introduced to universities because paper based filing causes loss of records (Netshakhuma, 2019). The introduction of ERMS at the university is necessary to improve accountability, transparency, access to information for the university is improved to meet the mandate of teaching and learning, research, and administrative management. The outline of ICT and records management are interrelated and enable universities to work efficiently, reduce costs and increase transparency (Hamid, Mokhtar, & Yusof, 2019). Creating the conditions for use of ERMS requires that choices of information Communication technology infrastructure such as hardware and software. However, it appears the increased availability of ERMS has not resulted in an

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effective records and archives management program in South African universities (Netshakhuma, 2019). The introduction of ICTs into university records management systems does not necessarily lead to the wide-scale, systematic, sustainable, and effective adoption of ERMS, improve access to information, compliance with National Archives and Records Service Act 43 of 1996.

South Africa has twenty-six (26) public universities, namely, the University of Cape Town, the University of KwaZulu Natal, University of Fort Hare, University of the Free State, north west University, University of Limpopo, University of Pretoria, Rhodes University, University of Stellenbosch, University of the Western Cape, University of the Witwatersrand, Walter Sisulu University, University of Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, University of Zululand, University of South Africa, University of Venda, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Durban University of Technology, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Tshwane University of Technology, University of Mpumalanga and Sol Plaatjie Universities. The Council of Higher Commission in South Africa commissioned a survey conducted at the university to assess the state of governance (CHE, 2015). The survey conducted by the Council of Higher education found the state of poor records management (Netshakhuma 2020). This means that the university lacks a strategy to manage records lifecycle, evidence of loss of records, lack of systematic disposal of records. Document review shows loss of data, poor accountability, and transparency on records management as a result of the lack of integrated electronic records management system. It seems that ERMS at most South African universities was implemented on an ad hoc basis without a preliminary investigation of an electronic system. The ERMS plays a role to enhance university to access university records, to preserve institutional memories. In addition, the records management system is not in compliance with the National Archives and Records Service Act 43 of 1996 Section 13.

Most of the South African universities are not managing their records effectively (Netshakhuma, 2019b). This means that there is a lack of records management strategy, collaboration, lack of training and awareness programs. University records include students, admissions, registrations academic, finance, human, research, faculty, administration, alumni records. South Africa records are managed in terms of the National Archives and Records Service (Act 43 of 1996), Protection of Personal Information Act (No. 4 of 2013). It is necessary to provide priority to manage university records because records are important for business continuity, preservation of corporate memory, For a university to function effectively, records need to be captured, recorded, and secured to ensure their authenticity, integrity, reliability, and accessibility (Giba Fosu 2020).

A review of the literature shows that most of the University records managers in South Africa were not trained on ERMS (Netshakhuma, 2019c; 2020b). This has alluded to Asogwa (2012; 202) who states that African records managers have not been trained on electronic records management. This means that records managers lack electronic records management skills. Besides the above-mentioned challenge, the Universities of Johannesburg embarked on a project to digitize records to improve access (Netshakhuma, 2019). However, most of the digitization projects in Africa failed because of a lack of an ERMS framework (Netshakhuma, 2019g). It appeared that most of the universities adopted ERMS without a strategy.

## **UNIVERSITY ERM STRATEGY**

ERMS strategy is a prerequisite to implementing a records management strategy plan. However, studies have shown that ERMS adoption is in the fancy stage in Africa based on the challenges mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. For example, the University of Ghana lacks records management procedures

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