

Chapter 8

Unpacking the Delayed Adoption of the Artificial Intelligence–Enabled Electronic Documents and Records Management System in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter assesses why Zimbabwe’s central government has taken long to adopt the artificial intelligence-powered electronic documents and records management system despite its importance in managing records. This is despite the 2017 resolution by the National Archives of Zimbabwe that the country was supposed to implement the electronic system as a necessary condition for the economic, efficient, and effective management of records in the public sector. This qualitative study used the case study of Zimbabwe’s central government and solicited data through open-ended interviews and document reviews. Informants were purposively selected because of their active role in the records management function. The chapter revealed that leveraging artificial intelligence technologies in managing records was the way to go, but government bottlenecks and bureaucracies, uncommitted senior management,

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financial constraints, poor information and communication technology skills, and resistance to change were stumbling blocks. The foregoing threatens the existence of the digital archive in Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

The electronic revolution has resulted in a rise in the creation, receipt, maintenance, preservation, and disposal of records using information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Ngoepe, 2017; Sigauke, 2022). This has necessitated the use of electronic records management systems to effectively and efficiently manage electronic records in line with current demands in the information industry. One of the trending systems is the electronic documents and records management system (EDRMS), a versatile solution that has proven to be effective in managing records in electronic form from the time records are created or received up to the time they are disposed of. The adoption of the EDRMS in Zimbabwe comes under the spotlight as the country has not adopted the system a quarter of a century after it was introduced on the market. This has raised questions regarding perceptions and the importance attached to the EDRMS by the public sector as well as the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), the national archival authority in the country. While these questions have sometimes been directed to archivists of national archival institutions, for example, in the case of Zimbabwe (Magama & Nduna, 2020), this chapter referred such questions to organizational insiders, that is, records and information supervisors, administration directors, and ICT deputy directors in Zimbabwe's central government.

This chapter firstly addressed perceptions of organizational insiders regarding the importance they attached to the EDRMS before it looked at why Zimbabwe's central government had taken so long to adopt the technology and with what consequences. The chapter was inspired by suggestions for future research by Magama and Nduna (2020, p.157) who pointed out that "more work [on EDRMS in the future] should also be directed towards understanding the impact of EDRMS solutions in various setups...[which] would equip institutions to effectively implement EDRMS solutions". Despite their optimism about the adoption of the system, the system is not yet in place.

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