CONCEPTUALISING EFFECTIVE RECORD MANAGEMENT OF MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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Abstract: Effective record management is critical for promoting good governance, particularly when dealing with prevalent criminal issues in the public sector such as corruption, fraud, and record falsification. As a result, records management must be seen as a vital activity at all organisational levels, regardless of the nature of the business or transactions. Previous research found that accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery are critical criteria for achieving good governance. Furthermore, lack of professionalism has been seen as a contributing factor to governance issues. To address these issues, this study suggests a conceptual framework for record management that combines the elements of professionalism, accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery. This framework aims to enhance good governance practices within Malaysia's public sector, aligning with the National Archives of Malaysia Strategic Plan 2021–2025 and the National Good Governance Plan (MyGovernment), thereby emphasising the significant role of records management in promoting good governance.

Keywords: Accountability, Effective Service Delivery, Transparency, Professionalism, Public Sector

1. Introduction

The public sector plays a crucial role in generating records and producing vital documents for daily operations, including fiscal, legal, and administrative activities that involve various types of record formats. Following the International Organisation for Standardisation [ISO] (ISO 15489-1:2001, amended 2016), records are information created, received, and sustained as valuable evidence of organisational operations or transactions. To maintain principles of good governance, the public sector must carefully document all acts and decisions. Good governance in the public sector is vital for sustainable development (Ali et al., 2020). Effective records management techniques serve as tools for oversight, enabling public audits to ensure compliance with established laws and regulations, thereby promoting transparency and accountability (Azman Mat Isa et al., 2019). Over time, accumulating records furnish essential evidence for future reference and informed decision-making (Barata & Cain, 1999).

Records management encompasses the entire lifecycle of records, from creation to maintenance, utilisation, and final disposition (Matlala & Maphoto, 2020). An effective records management practices guarantees that information is available and retrievable as required, facilitating efficient administration and decision-making (Aramide et al., 2020). It also aids in the proper disposal of obsolete records while safeguarding essential

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information for current and prospective usage (Nik Nurul Emyliana Nik Ramlee et al., 2018). Effective management are important for fostering accountability, transparency, and professionalism in the public sector and align with the National Archives of Malaysia's Strategic Plan (2021–2025), which underscores the enhancement of governance in records management as fundamental to effective decision-making (Touray, 2021). Records are important for facilitating administrative and financial activities and provide crucial evidence for smooth transactions in civil, administrative, criminal, and social justice matters.

The concept of good governance as defined by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is the establishment of organisational frameworks that consist of participatory, transparent, and accountable practices while fostering effectiveness, equity, and compliance with the rule of law. This concept has proven crucial for political and organizational procedures designed to attain developmental objectives. Its significance increased in the late 1980s, especially following the World Bank's 1989 study (McGrath & Whitty, 2015). Meyer (2018) contends that robust public institutions are essential for promoting economic progress, mitigating corruption, augmenting accountability, and bolstering political stability. In response to escalating demands for openness and accountability, several nations have restructured their public sectors to provide more reliable governance frameworks (Jamaliah Said et. al., 2015).

Studies indicate that effective governance markedly enhances public trust and confidence in governmental institutions (Mansoor, 2021). This point of view is similar to that of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia, who emphasised the need for good governance and preventing corruption to boost international investor confidence (Business Today Editorial, 2023). These initiatives highlight the essential function of accurate records for fostering transparency, accountability, and safeguarding public interest while additionally enhancing the integrity of public officials (Jamaliah Said et al., 2016; Likitrattanaporn, 2018). Nonetheless, governance failings, such as fraud, corruption, and inadequate internal controls, persist as substantial challenges. The prevalence of unethical conduct among public workers in Malaysia highlights the critical necessity for the comprehensive application of good governance principles to re-establish public trust (Norhasma Nafi & Amrizah Kamaluddin, 2019).

Records are essential to governance, as they supply the fundamental knowledge necessary for informed decision-making and policy formulation. Chaterera (2016) underscores that effective governance depends on dependable, accessible documentation. By analysing historical decisions, actions, and policies, governments can enhance their plans, sustain successful projects, and prevent the recurrence of previous errors. The consequences of insufficient records management practices became evident in 2018, when Malaysia lost Batu Putih Island to its neighbouring country, as decided by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands. This issue illustrates the significant role of reliability and accuracy documentation. Inadequate documentation undermined Malaysia's position in this sovereignty debate. Furthermore, Alliance IFA (M) Sdn Bhd's forensic audit report for Boustead Heavy Industries Corporation Berhad (BHIC) confirmed that the government had already determined the programme's vendor even before issuing the Letter of Award (LOA). Similarly, the issue revealed documentation inconsistencies, underscoring the negative implication of non-

compliance with records management rules. Some organisations fail to fully implement proper record management practices and neglect the records lifecycle process (Zakira Imana Harun et al., 2018).

In Malaysia, additional challenges arise from the lack of a dedicated records management profession. The responsibility often lies with cadre archives officers, who may lack the necessary expertise and commitment (Azman Mat Isa et al., 2019). This disparity leads to inaccuracies, the loss of essential knowledge, and inefficiencies that undermine governance. To address these challenges, this study proposes a conceptual framework for records management practices. This framework incorporates essential components such as professionalism, accountability, transparency, and efficient service delivery to improve governance in Malaysia's public sector. The National Archives of Malaysia Strategic Plan (2021–2025) and the National Good Governance Plan (My Government) both align with this framework, highlighting records management as a crucial component of good governance.

2. Research Methodology

The literature review was rigorously executed to thoroughly examine the current research environment in terms of records management practices and good governance with a specific focus on the research objectives to develop a proposed conceptual framework. This process attempted to identify the awareness of current knowledge, synthesise pertinent findings, and identify critical gaps in the literature that needed to be addressed. The necessary articles were retrieved from credible and scholarly sources such as the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), JSTOR, ProQuest, and Science Direct to achieve this.

The search strategy was carefully designed, employing specific keywords: "records management practices" and "good governance." The function of these keywords was to determine their relevancy and ability to capture the core of the research. Boolean operators, including "AND," "OR," and "NOT," were also used to narrow down the search results and find articles that were relevant to the topic of this research. Figure. 1. illustrates the research development process.
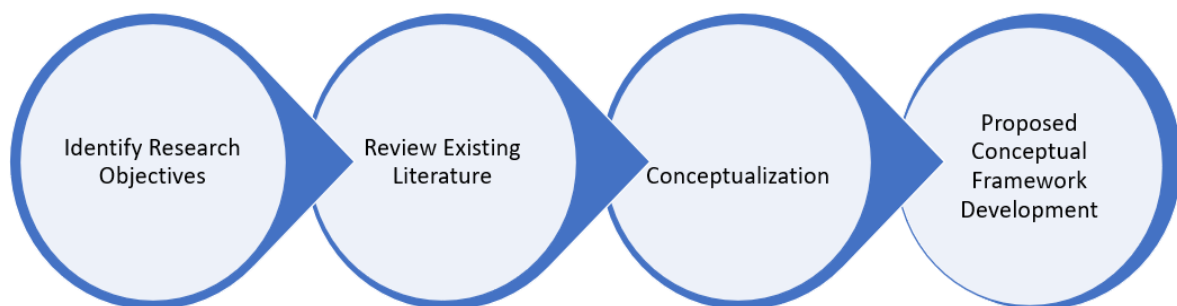

Figure. 1. Research Process

The literature review findings indicate that specific elements of good governance, accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery are more frequently cited and

deemed more significant in the aspect of records management practices. These elements are frequently highlighted as fundamental principles that significantly influence organisational efficiency, reliability, and good decision-making processes.

In comparison, other elements, including the rule of law, responsiveness, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, broad-based participation, consensus-oriented decision-making, regulatory quality, independence of the judiciary, control of corruption, integrity, fairness, and strategic vision, though essential, are less frequently highlighted or discussed in the reviewed studies. The disparity demonstrates the importance of accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery as the key areas for achieving good governance through records management practices. These elements are likely more practical and measurable outcomes, defining them as the essential elements of good governance frameworks in the literature. Table 1 shows a comprehensive overview by providing a structured comparison of the frequency and significance of various governance elements across the reviewed sources.

Table 1. Elements of Good Governance

Sources / Elements	UNDP (1997)	Anttiroiko and Valkama (2005)	World Bank Institute (2005)	Azman Mat Isa (2009)	UNESCO (2017)	Chatetera (2016)	Johnston (n.d.)	UNESCAP (n.d.)	Norhazma Nafi (2019)	Alwi Mohd Yunus (2020)
Accountability	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/		/
Transparency	/	/		/	/	/	/	/		/
Effective Service Delivery	/	/	/	/	/	/		/		/
Rule of Law			/		/		/	/		
Responsiveness	/				/			/		
Stability					/					
Equity and inclusiveness	/				/			/		
Empowerment					/					
Broad-based participation	/				/			/		
Consensus oriented	/							/		
Regulatory quality			/							
Independence of judiciary			/							
Control of corruption			/							
Integrity									/	
Fairness	/									
Strategic Vision	/									

Moreover, prior studies have also found that a lack of professionalism contributes to poor governance. Professionalism is one of the important elements in this study, as it can provide and enhance excellent services in records management practices. Professionalism, as defined by the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN), mentions that professional service means that every member of the organisation must have high knowledge and sufficient skills to carry out their duties and responsibilities. According to Norhaida Hanim Ahmad Tajudin et al. (2023), professionalism is an important component of the professional requirements of records management, as it is an important aspect for fostering good governance. The study identified key aspects of professionalism in records management practices, highlighting accountability, integrity, and honesty as the most crucial elements for efficient task execution. Furthermore, the study confirms that these essential behaviours significantly increase public confidence in public sector services through effective record management practices, hence prevent records management misconduct and guarantee the timely delivery of all public sector services. Thus, professionalism involves not only knowledge and skills but also attitudes and behaviour, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Elements of Professionalism

Sources / Elements	Ahmad Sarji (1994)	United Nation (2000)	IRMT (2002)	INTAN (2003)	Said et al. (2015)	Schon (2017)	Imana Harun et al. (2018)	Sami et al. (2018)	Omehia & Lulu-pokubo (2020)
Honesty	/			/	/	/		/	
Competency		/	/					/	
Accountability	/	/		/		/		/	
Self-Regulation		/			/	/		/	
Specialized Knowledge/Intellectual	/			/				/	
Skills			/				/		/
Integrity	/			/	/	/			/
Impartiality/Neutrality	/			/					
Good in Public Relations					/				/
Creativity				/					
Innovation				/					

Source: Norhaida Hanim Ahmad Tajudin et al. (2023)

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3. Result and Discussion

The proposed conceptual framework developed for this study is illustrated in Figure. 2 and it is discussed in this section. By illustrating these relationships, the conceptual framework aims to offer valuable insights into how these elements interact to address governance challenges and establish a foundation for further empirical investigations. The interaction of elements was derived from the literature in this research and then reconceptualised to make an original contribution to knowledge and to explore the relationships between elements of professionalism, accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery in records management practices in promoting good governance.
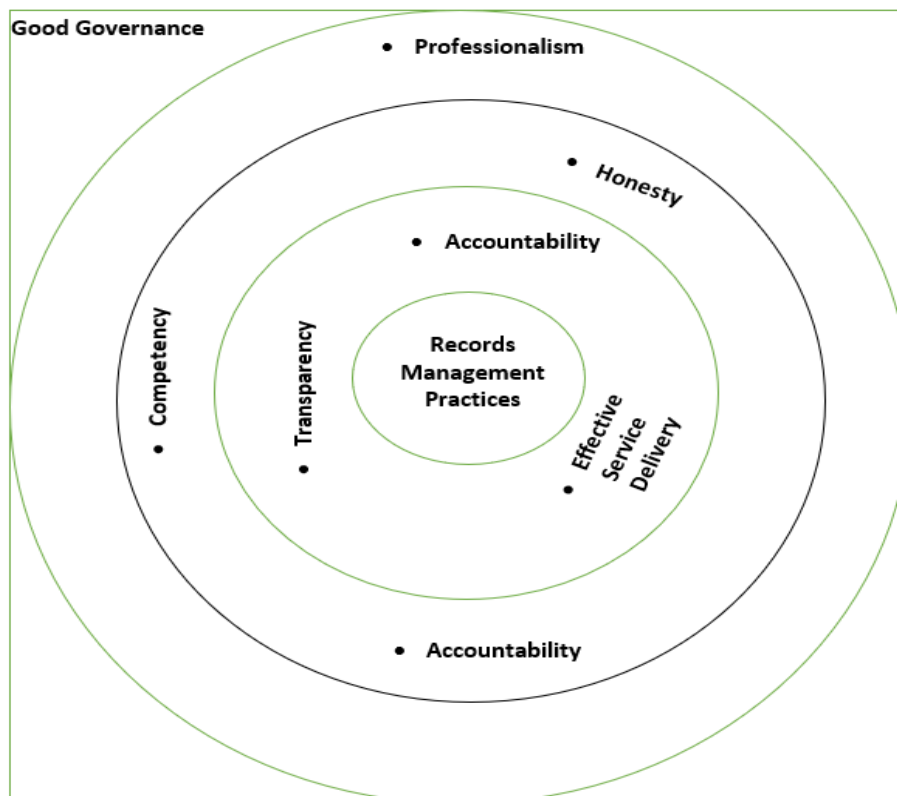

Figure. 2. A Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature, the proposed conceptual framework links accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery to the elements needed in record management practices. Competency, honesty, and accountability are the three aspects of professionalism addressed by the conceptual framework. These aspects are needed to provide accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery. Secure information delivery, accountability, and transparency in transactions are crucial elements of recordkeeping that contribute to people's trust (Alwi Mohd Yunus et al., 2020). According to a previous study by David (2017), Zimbabwean government agencies failed because they did not keep good records. This meant that fraud and misuse of public funds were possible because there were inconsistent records of not keeping books of accounts like the cash book, relevant ledgers, expenditure vouchers, receipts, and registers, as well as the required reconciliations that

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were not held accountable. This was particularly concerning in the context of government entities, where accountability is essential for maintaining public trust.

Mnjama (2023) conducted a study in Africa that underscores the essential function of well-preserved public records in fostering good governance, transparency, and accountability. These records frequently encounter neglect, inaccessibility, and underutilisation as a result of legislative and administrative challenges, which hinders national development and the safeguarding of individual rights. Nations like Estonia, Finland, and Norway show how good records management procedures improve accountability and openness by guaranteeing accurate, comprehensive, and easily accessible data. Effective records management practices ensure the availability of accurate, reliable, and accessible information, which is crucial for efficient service delivery.

Ayo-Olafare et al. (2024) found that record management practices and staff training have a significant impact on effective service delivery within the civil service of Ondo State, Nigeria. Personnel responsible for record management must have the requisite skills and knowledge to create, maintain, and preserve records in accordance with organisational policies and governance standards, highlighting the importance of staff competency. Boamah (2015) emphasised the importance of integrity in government via effective record management, illustrating how precise and transparent recordkeeping promotes accountability and trust. This reflects the principle of honesty, as personnel engaged in records management are required to maintain ethical standards by guaranteeing the accuracy, authenticity, and confidentiality of records to facilitate transparent governance.

Good governance is defined as a concept that adheres to rules and regulations and upholds uprightness in administering the country's resources. Effective and efficient records management practices require the management of records at every stage of their life cycle, regardless of their format (Amanchukwu & Ololube, 2015). According to Mosweu and Rakemane (2020), for the promotion of good governance to take place, there must be a need for proper record management. Therefore, effective record management practices serve as a valuable strategy for safeguarding the entire operation and assets within an organization. These are all beneficial frameworks for analysing records management practices as the force that accelerates or acts as the engine of the conveyance for good governance.

3.1 Record Management Practices

In the 1950s to 1960s, as the economy of the most developed countries continued to grow during the subsequent years, specialised records management facilities began to emerge (Eresimadu & Nduka, 2020). Nakaweesa (2019) mentioned that an efficient records management activity is crucial to an organisation's governance structure. Furthermore, Malak (2022) stated that records management best practices are vital for firms to preserve legal and regulatory compliance. In addition, they assist companies in better managing their records by organising, categorising, storing, and removing them. If records are handled effectively from the beginning of their life cycle, the smoother process is more successful and needs far less effort in the future to keep them safe

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(Strawser, 2021). Effective records management practices can ensure all processes, from creation until disposal, to be be run systematically and have a positive impact on the organisation. For government to achieve not only good governance, but also effective service delivery and accountability, good records management practices must be a norm. This is because records and information are a source of power to exercise control over citizens, and they empower them (Svärd, 2017).

3.2 Accountability

Accountability consists of three core elements: first, a higher authority entrusted with the power of oversight and supervision; second, a measure or criterion used by the higher authority to evaluate compliance or performance of mandated activities; and third, a clear reporting mechanism for delivering information to the higher authority (Cox & Wallace, 2002). It is thus obvious that access to records is needed to ensure transparency in public administration (De Mingo & Cerrillo-i-Martínez, 2018). Only records that comprise evidential, collateral, and perpetual functions have accountability for the actions and decisions taken by the government (Dikopoulou & Mihiotis, 2012). Therefore, the accountability of the records will also lead to their transparency. Both accountability and transparency elements are important as they can affect the delivery service of the records in the company.

3.3 Transparency

Transparency helps prevent the occurrence of conflicts of interest, minimizes the possible negative consequences of their existence, fosters the integrity of public offices and civil servants, and discourages corruption, which is generally associated with informal agreements outside of official and public decision-making channels (Arrowsmith et al., 2000; Kaufmann & Bellver, 2005; Mendieta, 2012). By enabling transparent processes, it allows relevant information to be accessible, traceable, and open to scrutiny. By ensuring that all actions and decisions adhere to the rule of law, records management can act as a tool to promote transparency. In other words, it can provide transparency for records.

3.4 Effective Service Delivery

Dootson et al. (2021) noted that records management in the public sector is integral to delivering public goods. Ultimately, well-managed records are fundamental to service delivery and good governance (Osebe et al., 2018). Mohamed et al. (2018) agreed that timely access to accurate, reliable, authentic, complete, and readable records over time is always difficult for both users and custodians. All these problems will delay the delivery of information and slow the decision-making process. The poor management of records does not only hinder the development process of organisations but also leads to ineffectiveness and inefficiency in service delivery (Touray, 2021). Ultimately, well-managed records are fundamental to service delivery and good governance (Osebe et al., 2018). Mohamed et al. (2018) agreed that timely access to accurate, reliable, authentic, complete, and readable records over time is always difficult for both users and custodians. All these problems will delay the delivery of information and slow the decision-making process.

3.5 Professionalism

Effective records management programmes depend on 'the right people with the right knowledge and skills' (Duffus, 2017). Professional records managers can use their skills and knowledge to carry out records policies and procedures and help an organisation comply with various mandates (Buchanan et al., 2017). Sami et al. (2018) highlighted that professionalism will increase their level of commitment to the public and organisations. Based on the literature review, there are many attributes and behaviours associated with being professional in records management practices. However, this study found that honesty, competency, and accountability were prioritised over other elements.

3.6 Honesty

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, honesty is sincerity, which is adherence to the facts. Schön (2017) highlighted that professionals are brave enough to accept their mistakes, and whenever they commit any mistake, they immediately admit it and hold themselves accountable for their thoughts, words, and actions. This personal accountability reflects their honesty and integrity, and it is an essential element of professionalism. In any difficult situation, they do not get upset or angry, but they remain calm, follow a business-like attitude to show true professionalism, and put in every effort to make the situation right. In records management practices, this attitude is essential to making sure all the records are protected and secured.

3.7 Competency

According to Matina and Ngulube (2019) employing competent staff to manage records is crucial. Based on the research conducted by Zakira Imana Harun et al. (2018), it was found that records management was lacking in professionalism because of a lack of skilled staff. If an individual has all the academic certificates but still fails to work competently, then it is also disruptive to the individual as well as organisational performance.

3.8 Accountability

Accountability is also an ideal behaviour element in professionalism that was identified through a literature review. Cox and Wallace (2002) stated that the chief value of record is a broad accountability binding individuals, organisations, government, and society with each other across space and time. Records keep pace with an organisation's functioning, but even though they exist, if they cannot be retrieved and used, the organisation would not be able to be evaluated. This study found that accountability elements are also part of the most prominent aspect of professionalism. Thus, it shows that accountability should be practiced and become a culture in the public sector (Azman Mat Isa et al., 2019).

3.9 Good Governance

The concept of good governance is related to the measurement of governance in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, economy, and the achievement of social outcomes (Monteduro et al., 2016). Meanwhile, according to Meyer (2018), the concepts of good governance and effective government have been at the top of the public management agenda over the last decade and is seen as a central factor in growth and development. According to Salminen and Rinna (2010), Zabala and Peñol (2018), good governance is a concept that verifies an ideal administrative behaviour and rejects unethical behaviour. Governance promotes a rule of law that leads to the organisation's integrity and effectiveness in decision-making, services, and interests (Alwi Mohd Yunus et al., 2020) whereas good governance refers to government agencies' conduct in implementing innovative policies and programmes to increase the quality of public service with the ultimate aim of increasing economic growth (Asaolu et al., 2016; Grindle, 2004; Hellman et al., 2000). By upholding justice and successfully implementing national development, good governance plays a critical role in boosting public confidence in public sector services through good records management practices.

4. Conclusion

The objective of this study is to develop a conceptual framework for the role of records management practices in promoting good governance in Malaysia. The proposed conceptual framework discussed in this study highlights several elements that are essential to be included in records management practices to promote good governance in the public sector. This study is useful in identifying the effect of records management practices on good governance in the public sector to ensure the integrity of records can be forever sustained. It will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector information delivery and gain the satisfaction and trustworthiness of users towards the public sector, such as by giving trusted records as evidence when needed or required in any case. Therefore, it will lead to good governance in the public sector.

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