

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ZIMBABWE IN FOSTERING PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT OF EMAIL IN ZIMBABWE'S CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Samson Mutsagondo

Department of Information Science
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa
Email: 57649308@mylife.unisa.ac.za

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article History:</i> Received: January Revised: March Accepted: March Available Online: April</p> <hr/> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Email, Email management, Electronic records, Electronic records management, National Archives of Zimbabwe</p> <hr/> <p><i>JEL Classification:</i> D8, D80, D83</p>	<p><i>Management of emerging technologies such as business electronic mail (email) has been a perennial challenge in many developing countries. Amongst challenges to effective management of email are lapses in legal, policy and procedural frameworks, skills and information and communication technology infrastructural deficiencies. The national archival authority in Zimbabwe, the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), has received a lot of criticism for failing to give direction and help public institutions in managing email in accordance with the provisions of Section 6 of the NAZ Act (1986) which gives the NAZ a superintending role in the management of records in any format in the country. This paper traces the current interventionist role that the NAZ is playing with regards to the management of email. The article focuses on Zimbabwe's central government where head offices of 12 out of 22 government ministries participated in the study. This mixed methods research sought to tackle the research question from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. A total of 240 records officers, administration officers and information technology officers completed questionnaires while seven NAZ archivists, the NAZ director, one Administration Director and one Information Technology Director from central government participated as interviewees. The study revealed that NAZ had of recent begun to play a more proactive role in helping central government manage email properly and professionally although the assistance was not vibrantly felt across the length and breadth of the entire public service.</i></p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Electronic mail (email) has been in use from the 1970s but it has recently emerged as an indispensable technology in the world today due to its substantive use as an official record in business organisations. The management of email as an official record is one of the most challenging tasks facing records officers, information professionals, records managers and archivists in our time. Seow, Chennupati and Foo (2005) claimed at the turn of the 21st century that email was the worst managed of all types of records. Subsequent studies such as Sejane (2004) in Lesotho; Keakopa (2007) in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa; Nengomasha (2009) in Namibia; Sigauke, Nengomasha and Chabikwa (2016) in Zimbabwe and Chihambakwe, Wutete and Sigauke (2017) in Zimbabwe show that the management of email was a challenge where different officers managed email according to their own limited skills, intuition and experience. Many scholars have blamed national archival institutions for failing to provide guidance on how specialised records like email should be managed. The National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), the archival authority in the country has not been spared.

Email refers to digital mail. Nightingale, Song, Michelson and Field (2012) define email as the electronic version of paper mail while Nengomasha (2009) defines email as mail sent or received electronically. Email is an electronic record and one of the most popular of electronic records used in Zimbabwe's public sector (Sigauke, Nengomasha and Chabikwa, 2016). The origins of email are as controversial as the inventor of the technology. There are three schools of thought as regards the inventor and the date of origins of email. One school of thought advances that email was invented by Shiva Ayyadurai, a 14-year-old Indian immigrant from New Jersey in the United States of America in 1978 (Nightingale, Song, Michelson and Field 2012).

The second school of thought attributes email to the American Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in the 1980s where it is claimed email was first used by the United States army to support military battlefield communication from one location to another (Nightingale, Song, Michelson and Field, 2012). The last school of thought attributes the invention of email to Ray Tomlinson, an ARPANET contractor, who in 1972 developed the "SNDMSG command programme" on the Internet (Pignata, Lushington, Sloan and Buchanan, 2015). Nonetheless, the professional management of email has been a challenge which has seen many scholars and critics laying blame on national archival institutions for failing to show the way.

Zimbabwe's central government is one institution that has been relying on email for sending and receiving official messages, in addition to preserving the messages for administrative, fiscal and legal purposes as well as archiving them for posterity. Zimbabwe's public service is divided into three that is, central government, local government and subsidiary bodies. Central government, refers to government ministries, for example, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage. Local government refers to city and rural councils, for example, the Municipality of Marondera and Vungu Rural District Council, respectively. Subsidiary bodies refers to public institutions set up by Acts of Parliament, for example, the University of Zimbabwe and Environmental Management Agency. Email is officially used throughout Zimbabwe's public service, but focus in this study is restricted to central government where only head offices of government ministries participated in the study.

1.1 Objectives of the study

This article sought to examine the interventionist role of the NAZ in email management within central government in line with its mandate as enshrined in the NAZ Act (1986). This aim was unpacked by addressing the following two objectives.

- (i) To establish the role played by NAZ in helping Zimbabwe's central government manage email properly and professionally.
- (ii) To assess the impact of the role of NAZ in as far as professional management of email was concerned.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was a mixed methods research where the convergent research design was used. A total of 240 records, information technology and administration officers from 12 out of 22 government ministries completed questionnaires. Seven NAZ archivists, one NAZ director and one administration and one IT director participated in the study as interviewees. In addition to questionnaires and interviews, data were collected through personal observation and document reviews. Findings from qualitative data helped to corroborate findings from quantitative data, thus helping to achieve higher levels of validity, reliability, dependability and credibility. Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel 2010® as well as through descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were analysed thematically using Atlas.ti®.

3 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Records Officers (ROs), Administration Officers (AOs) and Information Technology officers (ITOs) in Zimbabwe's central government were asked through questionnaires whether or not NAZ was assisting them in professionally managing email as an official record. Their responses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: NAZ is assisting central government in managing email professionally (N=240)

Response	ROs	AOs	ITOs	Totals
Yes	48 (60%)	30 (37.5%)	36 (45%)	114 (47.5%)
No	18 (22.5%)	42 (52.5%)	32 (40%)	92 (38.3%)
No response	14 (17.5%)	8 (10%)	12 (15%)	34 (14.2%)

A total of 114 respondents (47.5%) stated that the NAZ was assisting central government in managing email properly and professionally. More ROs than AOs and ITOs saw the role of the NAZ as positive. A total of 92 (38.3%) respondents stated that NAZ was not assisting central government in managing email professionally. More AOs and ITOs than ROs were sceptical about the role played by the NAZ. A total of 34 (14.2%) respondents did not respond to the question. Six (86%) NAZ archivists stated that most ROs saw the role played by the NAZ as positive because they worked more directly with NAZ and so were more aware of latest email and records management initiatives by the archival institution than their counterparts.

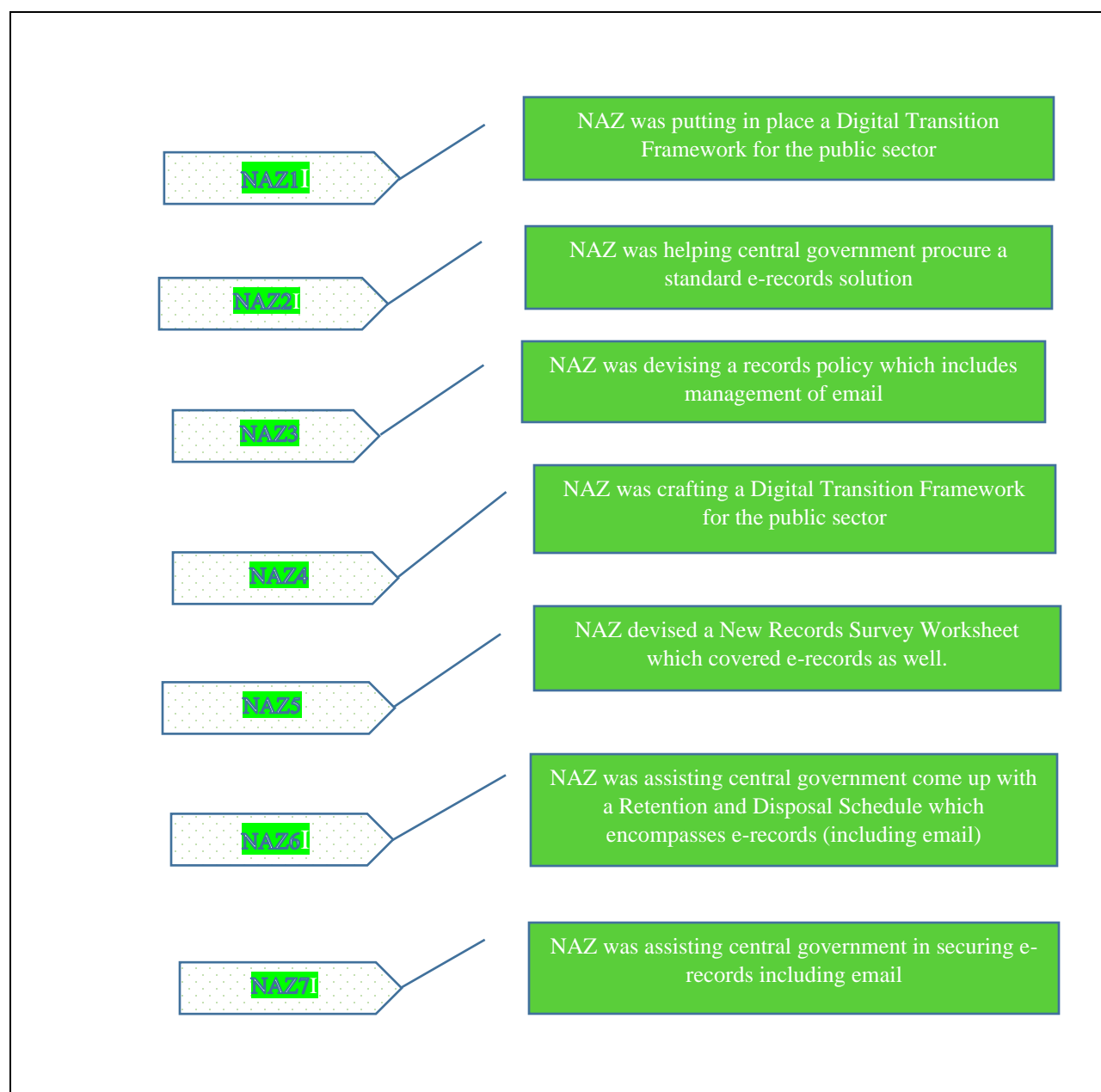
The 114 respondents who confirmed the positive role by the NAZ were asked to state areas where NAZ was assisting them to improve their management of email. The responses of ROs, AOs and ITOs are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Areas in which NAZ is assisting central government manage email (N= 114)

Area in which NAZ is assisting	ROs	AOs	ITOs	Totals
Retention and disposal schedules	12	5	8	25 (21.9%)
Procurement of an EDRMS	18	12	11	41 (35.9%)
Procurement of an email system	3	1	2	6 (5.2%)
Records policy draft	10	10	3	23 (20.2%)
Digital transition framework	5	1	12	18 (15.8%)
Email procedures manuals	0	1	0	1 (0.9%)
Total	48	30	36	114 (100%)

Efforts by the NAZ in leading the Electronic Records and Documents Management System (EDRMS) procurement process ranked as the most popular indicator (35.9%) of NAZ's involvement in helping central government improve its management of email. An EDRMS is a records management system that is used to manage records electronically, inclusive of email. The second most popular indicator (21.9%) was the development by NAZ of a public sector-wide electronic records retention and disposal schedule. Three (43%) NAZ archivists who participated in the study as interviewees confirmed that development of a public sector-wide retention and disposal schedule was indeed work-in-progress in Zimbabwe. The development of a records policy draft (20.2%) was the third most popularly cited indicator. In support of the draft policy, the Director of the NAZ indicated that a public sector-wide draft records policy was developed by the NAZ in 2019. The draft policy which is still being refined, caters for the management of both paper and electronic records including email. Ranking lowly as indicators of NAZ's involvement in email management in Zimbabwe's central government were the digital transition framework (15.8%); procurement of an email system (5.2%) and the development of an email procedures manual (0.9%).

Since the study was mixed methods, interviews were also held to confirm or refute findings from questionnaires. Seven NAZ archivists (depicted as NAZ1; NAZ2 ... up to NAZ7); the Director of the National Archives; the Administration Director and the Information Technology Director from central government participated in the study as interviewees. The fact that NAZ was assisting central government to improve its management of email was corroborated by all the seven NAZ archivists and the Director of the NAZ. All NAZ archivists indicated that NAZ had shifted its policy towards management of electronic records, of which email is a subset. Each archivist was asked to state one area where NAZ was assisting central government in managing email properly and professionally. The figure below shows the responses of the seven archivists.



NAZ archivists' responses on NAZ assistance to central government in managing email

The most popular response from NAZ archivists was the issue of the Digital Transition Framework (DTF), which was pointed out by NAZ1 and NAZ4. The framework as explained by the NAZ Director was a platform adopted by NAZ to guide the smooth transition from paper based records regime to a hybrid of paper and electronic records and eventual to a “paper-less” records management regime. It is important to note that “paper-less” in this context denotes “less use of paper” and not “total absence of paper”. Regardless of its popularity with NAZ archivists, the issue of the Digital Transition Framework was one of the least cited indicators by ROs, AOs and ITOs from Zimbabwe’s central government. This implied that although the issue contributed in part towards improved email management, it was not widely publicised throughout central government.

As indicated by NAZ2 and NAZ6, the national archival institution was also currently assisting Zimbabwe's central government by laying the groundwork for the procurement of the EDRMS. This confirmed views raised by the majority (35.9%) of respondents who included ROs, AOs and ITOs in central government. In support of NAZ's EDRMS contribution, NAZ2 remarked;

NAZ has traditionally been blamed for not doing enough in as far as electronic records are concerned. This is now a thing of the past. NAZ is moving out of its cocoons to shape the way forward for the management of electronic records. In the process, the issue of email would be addressed since email is one of the most popular type of electronic records. As we are speaking now, Zimbabwe is on the verge of procuring a customised EDRMS, which would definitely change the face of electronic records management, including that of email.

NAZ3 stated that NAZ was assisting central government in coming up with a public sector records policy, confirming the views of 20.2% of questionnaire respondents. The draft records policy which was developed in 2019 catered for the professional management of email in areas like email classification, filing, creation, receipt, access, retention, use, appraisal, maintenance, preservation, retrieval, security and disposal. Documentary evidence revealed that the draft policy had a section on email management. NAZ3 made this remark;

Intricacies faced in managing email are set to end very soon as the draft records policy is about to be officially launched. In 2019, the draft policy was presented before key and general stakeholders. In 2020, the draft would be presented before the policy department of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage under whose tutelage NAZ department falls. Once the policy is in place, all email issues, prospects and challenges would be ironed out.

NAZ5 weighed in with an indicator that had eluded the attention of all other participants as he raised the issue of NAZ developing a new records survey worksheet in 2019. NAZ uses a records survey worksheet during the process of conducting records management surveys in government ministries and departments, subsidiary bodies and local authorities. The Director of NAZ stated that unlike the old records survey worksheet which had one question on electronic records, the new records survey worksheet has many questions which cover the management of electronic records including email. Documentary evidence revealed that the new records survey worksheet focused on the management of paper and electronic records inclusive of capture and registration of records, classification, retention and disposal, transfer, access and security, ICT infrastructure, policies and guideline as well as knowledge and skills. NAZ5 commented;

We have moved from a records survey worksheet that had one question on electronic records out of 12 questions. Now, every facet of the questionnaire addresses manual records alongside electronic records. Even in the deliberations made during the survey, NAZ offers advice on management of all formats of records including email. The new records survey worksheet was rolled out at the end of 2019 and as such, many public sector institutions may not be aware that NAZ is now addressing some of the concerns that they have had for a long time.

Other areas where interviewees stated NAZ was assisting central government included security of email and development of a retention and disposal schedule for the entire public sector which included management of electronic records, inclusive of email. The researcher had access to documentary evidence in 3 out of the 12 ministries in the study where their updated retention and disposal schedules showed how electronic records were supposed to be disposed. This confirmed sentiments of 21.9% questionnaire respondents that NAZ was helping them better manage email by devising public sector-wide retention and disposal schedules.

This article also assessed the impact of the role that NAZ was playing in enhancing proper management of email. The three directors in the study were asked to make the assessment since they deal with policy issues and strategic matters in government. The Administration Director felt that NAZ was not doing enough in assisting central government manage email. She stated that although the NAZ and central government interacted on many platforms, the issue of email management remained clumsy to such an extent that central government “had to go it alone, using its own means and measures to get things done”. She added that many electronic records management challenges that the Government of Zimbabwe faced were a result of NAZ’s failure to take full responsibility and control over the management of electronic records in the country. For her, the NAZ still had a lot to do in order to prove that the management of email was on the right course or would soon be on the right course.

The Information Technology Director was also apprehensive about the role that NAZ was playing in helping central government manage email. He made the following comment;

The role of NAZ in electronic records management is rather vague. The IT department of government ministries sometimes stretches to find their own means to manage electronic records without input or guidance from NAZ.

For the Information Technology Director, the impact of NAZ’s intervention was not felt across the length and breadth of the public service. He further stated that a lot still had to be done by the archival authority before the management of email in the country could be pronounced as “smooth-sailing”.

The Director of the NAZ pointed out that NAZ was working hard to make sure the institution was in firm control of the management of records in whatever format in the country. He stated that NAZ was committed to fully paying attention to its mandate. This included superintending over the management of records in any format. However, the Director of NAZ was quick to admit that there was slow progress in reviewing the NAZ Act (1986) which was rather silent about the management of records in electronic form. Nevertheless, he was optimistic, commenting that “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. NAZ had begun embarking on this journey ... Better late than never”.

4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Failure by national archival institutions to take full charge and control over the management of records in electronic form has been widely noted in many developing countries. It has been seen in Lesotho (Sejane, 2004), Namibia (Nengomasha, 2009), Botswana, South Africa and Namibia (Keakopa, 2007) and Zimbabwe (Chaterera, 2013; Mutsagondo, 2017; Sigauke, Nengomasha and Chabikwa, 2016). Keakopa (2007) as well as Ngulube and Tafor (2006) argue that the role played by national archival institutions of many developing countries in managing email was rather marginal. Matangira (2016) also commented that many archival institutions in developing countries were overwhelmed with traditional manual records systems and were slow in incorporating ICTs in managing records and archives. This meant management of records which heavily depended on modern ICTs was rather poorly articulated.

It is true that proper and professional management of records in any format lie in the hands of the national archival institution. In Zimbabwe, Section 6 of the NAZ Act (1986) empowers the NAZ to superintend over the management of records in any format. Thus, it is not wrong for some scholars to blame the NAZ for failing to take the lead in charting the proper and professional management of records in electronic form. Writing in 2013, Chaterera (2013) held that the NAZ did not play an active role in overseeing the manner in which records in electronic format were managed. She even pointed out to the existence of a records survey worksheet which had a single question (out of 12) on electronic records. Seven years after Chaterera's observation, a lot has changed on the Zimbabwean records management landscape. Magama and Nduna (2020) opine that the NAZ had changed course when the institution embarked on the "journey to an EDRMS solution" starting in 2018. Thus, the institution needs more of support in terms of finance, manpower, policy and legal framework than blame for historical commissions and omissions.

Although, the "giant" is awakening, a lot still need to be done in too little time. The views expressed by central government's Administration Director and Information Technology Director that the role of NAZ was not very visible hold water. While issues of ICT infrastructure (EDRMS) and policies (records policy draft; retention and disposal schedules) are being addressed, the legal and skills issues remained unattended. Zimbabwe needs to take a leaf from South Africa whose National Archives and Records Service (NARS) Act (1996) cover the management of electronic records in many respects, including the management of email (Katuu and Ngoepe, 2015). Without taking anything away from the ongoing efforts by the NAZ, a review of the NAZ Act (1986) should be the starting point to address the proper and professional management of records in electronic form including email. It is still the role of NAZ to make sure officers in central government have the right skills needed in managing official email. In support of this assertion, ISO 15489 (2016:10) avers that people who create, capture and manage records, in whatever format, should be competent to perform records management duties as assigned or expected and that such competencies should be regularly evaluated from time to time in line with changing trends within the field of records and information management.

5 CONCLUSION

NAZ previously played a passive role in aiding the management of email in Zimbabwe's central government. Attention in managing records by the NAZ used to be solely in line with the management of paper records. Nonetheless, the NAZ is slowly coming out of its cocoons to play a leading role in influencing and shaping the manner in which electronic records should be managed. Email is one such electronic record. The journey towards an EDRMS, the draft records policy, the new records survey worksheet and the public sector-wide electronic retention and disposal schedules are among the most visible indicators of NAZ's active role in helping shape the proper and professional management of email. As revealed by the Administration Director and the Information Technology Director from central government, NAZ's active involvement was a welcome development but more still had to be done to make the role by NAZ more vibrantly felt across the length and breadth of the public sector. The sentiments by the Director of NAZ that "a journey of a thousand miles begin with a single step" shows the optimism and confidence that the records regulatory authority in Zimbabwe has in making professional management of email a reality.

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