



**MZUZU UNIVERSITY**

**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Department of Information Sciences**

**RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AT M'MBELWA DISTRICT COUNCIL IN  
THE NORTHERN REGION OF MALAWI**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Library and Information Science in the Department of Information Sciences,  
Mzuzu University, Malawi**

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## DECLARATION

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## **ABSTRACT**

The proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies has enabled public institutions to create an increased number of paper and electronic records which require proper management. The purpose of this study was to investigate records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council in the Northern Region of Malawi. Specifically, the study aimed at establishing the existing records management practices; examining the existence of policy framework governing records management; establishing the benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery; and investigating factors that contribute to effective records management.

The study was guided by the pragmatic paradigm which led to the use of mixed methods approach and adoption of convergent parallel design. The study was underpinned by the Records Continuum Model. The study used a sample size of 44 comprising 9 top management staff, 17 middle management staff, 16 clerical level staff, one records officer, and one management information systems officer. The data was collected using structured questionnaires, interview guides, observation guide, and document analysis guide. Quantitative data was analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences software version 20, while qualitative data was analysed thematically. The results were presented quantitatively using tables, graphs, percentages, and qualitatively using themes.

The study found that hybrid records were created at M'mbelwa District Council in paper and electronic formats. The hybrid records included minutes, emails, reports, staff appraisal, leave applications, receipts, appointment letters, assets registers, government circulars, policy manuals, attendance reports, requisitions, correspondences, and instructions. These records were captured using computers, Integrated Financial Management Information System, notebooks, and personal cell phones. Most Council employees store paper records in their offices using files, shelves, folders, drawers, and metallic filing cabinets. For e-records, the most used storage facilities were computers, flash drives, and Integrated Financial Management Information System. The study further found that the Council did not have records retention and disposition schedule, records management policy, plans, and guidelines. However, there was a positive relationship between public records management and government service delivery at M'mbelwa District Council. The study also established that members of staff at the Council had knowledge in records management practices which they obtained mostly through on-the-job-training. Nevertheless,

personnels' skills in records management practices ranged from moderate to poor. As for records management infrastructure, the study established the existence of computers, printers, Internet, Integrated Financial Management Information System, electronic record backup system, scanners, cloud computing, lockable wooden filing cabinets, wooden shelves, lockable wooden drawers, files, and folders. However, top management support in terms of funding of various records management activities was not adequate. The study concludes that records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council are not properly organised.

Therefore, the study recommends that M'mbelwa District Council should consider developing a records management system, policy, plans and guidelines, develop records management into a full department with its own budget vote, and improve top management support towards records management practices.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my late father who passed on during the period of this study, he always wanted me to succeed in life.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I thank the Almighty God for guiding and being with me throughout the time of writing this dissertation.

I sincerely appreciate my supervisor, Associate Professor George Theodore Chipeta (PhD) for providing valuable guidance in this study. This would have been impossible without his support, motivation and constructive criticism that saw me through.

I also recognise all members of staff and fellow masters' students in the Department of Information Sciences at Mzuzu University. I do not take your support for granted.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

CSP:	Cloud Service Provider
DC:	District Commissioner
DMP:	Data Management Policy
ERMS:	Electronic Records Management System
GCC:	Gaborone City Council
GOM:	Government of Malawi
ICA:	International Council on Archives
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology
IFMIS:	Integrated Financial Management Information System
MMR:	Mixed Methods Research
NSO:	National Statistics Office
OMA:	Offinso Municipal Council
PFMA:	Public Finance Management Act
PSRMU:	Public Sector Reforms Management Unit
RCM:	Records Continuum Model
RLCM:	Records Lifecycle Model
SMC:	Singida Municipal Council
SPSS:	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TMC:	Temeke Municipal Council
UK:	United Kingdom
UNISA:	University of South Africa
USA:	United States of America
VERS:	Victorian Electronic Strategy Model

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council in the Northern Region of Malawi with a view to promote open governance for effective and efficient public service. Public institutions intensely interact with various stakeholders. These interactions generate a lot of information which is the life-blood of any organisation (Vella, 2017). Ideally, such information is captured on records that organisations generate in both paper and electronic formats (Mutsagondo, 2021). Records keep track of what is done and why it is done. Records serve as proof of communications, decisions, and engagements in an institution (Rutta & Ndenje-Sichalwe, 2021). Good records management practices are important as they provide a platform for availing reliable and accurate information upon request, enabling open governance (Motlhasedi, 2022). The proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has enabled public institutions to create an increased number of paper and electronic records. Public institutions are therefore required to organise, manage, use and preserve these records according to the laws governing public information (Makwae, 2021).

An understanding of records management starts with appreciating what a record is. A record is “a document made or received in the course of activity as an instrument or by product of such activity and kept for further action or reference” (Duranti, 2014, p. 1). Records are documents created or received in paper or electronic format showing evidence of business transactions taking place in any organisation. The significance of records cannot be over emphasised. Just as individuals rely on maps to tell where they are and where they might go, people rely on records to know what organisations have done or decided (World Bank, 2020). Thus, organisations use records and other sources of evidence to execute current actions, confirm past actions, and plan future actions. Records management is “the systematic control of an organisation’s records, throughout their life cycle, in order to meet operational business needs, statutory and fiscal requirements and community expectations” (National Archives of Scotland, 2013, p. 1). Records management involves controlling the processes of creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records in an organisation. Records management is necessary to ensure that information can be accessed easily when needed and destroyed when not needed (Ambira, 2016).

The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 15489-1 (2016) indicates that approaches to the creation, capture and management of records based on the concepts and principles of ISO 15489-1 standards ensure that authoritative evidence of business is created, captured, managed and made accessible to those who need it. ISO 15489-1 (2016) further indicates that this enables improved transparency and accountability, effective policy formation, and informed decision-making among others. Records management plays a significant role in enhancing prudent use of resources hence preventing mismanagement, fraud, corruption and embezzlement. Principles of good governance such as accountability, transparency and the rule of law can only be promoted in African countries when records are properly managed and made accessible to the public at the right time (Mosweu & Rakemane, 2020). Poor records management practices lead to poor public service delivery and uninformed decision-making by officials (Makgahlela, 2020).

Public institutions in Malawi create, keep, and use records on an everyday basis for administrative, legal, and audit functions among other purposes. These public records need to be professionally managed so that they are easily accessed by those in need of them as provided in Chapter IV of the Constitution of Republic of Malawi, Section 37, which stipulates that, “Subject to any Act of Parliament, every person shall have the right of access to all information held by the State or any of its organs at any level of Government in so far as such information is required for the exercise of his rights (Government of Malawi (GOM), 2017). This study, therefore, investigated records management practices at M’mbelwa District Council in the Northern Region of Malawi. The extent of records management practices at this district council was not known. Subsequent section gives background information of the study.

## **1.2 Background of the study**

This study was conducted at M’mbelwa District Council in the Northern Region of Malawi. The primary role of district councils in Malawi is to provide effective, efficient, and sustainable socio-economic services that improve the livelihood of people through creation of conducive environment, enhanced by good governance and community participation to achieve social economic growth and development (Public Sector Reforms Management Unit (PSRMU), 2022). According to Hussein (2017), functionality of district councils in Malawi is provided for in Section 146 of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, Section 6 of Local Government Act



of 2010, and Section 6 of the Malawi Decentralisation Policy of 1998. As a result of the creation of new districts, the number of district councils has increased from 25 during the single party rule to 28 district councils (GOM, 2013). The Local Government Act of 2010 mandates district councils to: make decisions on local governance and development for the district; promote infrastructural and economic development through district development plans; consolidate and promote local democratic participation; and mobilise resources within and outside the district (PSRMU, 2022). Each district council is headed by a District Commissioner (DC) with the help of senior management officers (directors), middle level managers (departmental heads), and those holding clerical positions in various departments of the district.

M'mbelwa District Council has 10,990 employees including those who are not directly involved in the management of the council (Auditor General Report, 2019). The Council's administration proper has 1,784 employees (T. Nyirenda, personal communication, August 16, 2022). According to National Statistics Office (NSO) (2018), Mzimba District, which is governed by M'mbelwa District Council, is the largest district in Malawi and covers an area of 10,430 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 610,944. The Viphya Mountains extend through the southern and eastern portion of the district, and western boundary of the district lies along the Malawi-Zambia border (NSO, 2018). Having such a big jurisdiction area, with such a large number of employees, Mzimba District Council produces a huge amount of paper and electronic documentation which calls for this study.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Efficient records management is the foundation block for successful transparency and accountability initiatives without which organisations' efficiency would be compromised, leading to corruption and loss of confidence (Rotich et al., 2017). Public records management practices in developed countries such as the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), and Australia are at an advanced stage such that government agencies have policies, standards, guidelines, and skilled personnel relevant to the management of both paper and electronic records (Australian National Audit Office, 2013; Ginsberg, 2016).

Contrary to what is happening in the global north, public records management practices of public institutions in Africa are mostly in disarray as seen in developing countries of Tanzania, Nigeria,

South Africa, and Malawi which have common problems including ineffective records management programmes; low levels of skills and knowledge among records personnel; absence of records management policies, plans and guidelines; and missing of important records (Lihoma, 2012; Phiri & Tough, 2018; Rutta & Ndenje-Sichalwe, 2021).

Most public administrators in Malawi lack in-depth modern managerial skills and approaches to public sector records and information management (Lihoma, 2012). A number of studies, press reports and experiences indicate that record keeping in Malawi's public service is poor (Chimjeka, 2015; Mhango, 2015; Mpaka, 2016). This was supported by the then Malawi Government Chief Secretary's Circular No. 15/15/2 of 17<sup>th</sup> March 2017, which deplored the poor records management in the public service (Chief Secretary for Government of Malawi, 2017). A local press report indicated that three senior members of staff at M'mbelwa District Council in early September, 2021 were suspended by the Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture over among other reasons failure to submit quarterly reports/records for business transactions (Times Group, 2021). Further, this author being a resident in the Northern Region of Malawi has also witnessed several developmental projects such as construction of Ekwendeni Community Day Secondary School Girls Hostel which is under M'mbelwa District Council being halted due to among other things failure to account for project funds because of missing of project records. According to Z. Mhango (personal communication, August 4, 2022) efforts to track the Ekwendeni Community Day Secondary School Girls Hostel project records have proved futile. The above incidents are against the Malawi's Access to Information Act of 2017, specifically, Section 13 (2) which stipulates that "every information holder shall ensure proper organisation and maintenance of all information or records in its custody, in a manner that facilitates smooth access to such information or records" (Access to Information Act, 2017, p. 8). Further, the National Planning Commission (2020) also indicates that the incidents above are contradicting to enabler number 2 of Malawi's 2063 vision, which is, effective governance systems and institutions, which promotes openness and transparency in government processes and decisions by ensuring that Malawians have access to information.

The events above, therefore, motivated this researcher to pose the following question: How are records being managed in the Malawian public institutions? Literature, however, indicates that some studies on records management practices have been conducted in the Malawian public institutions. Phiri and Tough (2018) focused on records management in public universities;

whereas Chaputula's (2022) study focussed on e-records management practices in public universities. It is only Malanga and Kamanga's (2019) study which targeted a local authority, Karonga District Council, with focus on e-records readiness. None of these studies examined how district councils in Malawi manage both paper and electronic records. This study, therefore, filled in that gap by investigating records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council. There are no known studies on this topic conducted at this district council.

#### **1.4 Aim of the study**

The aim of the study was to investigate records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council in the Northern Region of Malawi.

#### **1.5 Research objectives**

This study sought to address the following objectives:

- i. To establish the existing records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council.
- ii. To examine the existence of policy framework governing records management at M'mbelwa District Council.
- iii. To establish the benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery at M'mbelwa District Council.
- iv. To investigate factors that contribute to effective records management at M'mbelwa District Council.

#### **1.6 Research questions**

The following research questions were addressed:

- i. What are the existing records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council?
- ii. What policy framework is governing records management at M'mbelwa District Council?
- iii. What are the benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery at M'mbelwa District Council?
- v. What are the factors contributing to effective records management at M'mbelwa District Council?

## **1.7 Rationale of the study**

The operationalisation of Access to Information Law in 2020 means that Malawian citizens have the right to access information from public institutions including district councils. District councils, therefore, should have in place efficient records management programmes to meet the Access to Information Law requirements. This study was necessitated by the fact that the district councils require citizens to be provided with accurate, complete, reliable and trustworthy information. This is on the backdrop that the district councils commit to among other things, engaging the public and encouraging citizen participation in local governance following many years of local governance malpractice. The availability of reliable information can only be a product of a sound records management regime.

## **1.8 Significance of the study**

The study findings may contribute to the existing body of knowledge in records management. The findings may later also be published in some reviewed journals. The study may also contribute to the improvement of policy by creating awareness among policy makers about the need to integrate records management policies in governance. This integration is important because records management provides the means through which the creation, capture, availability and usability of accurate, reliable and trustworthy records take place.

Lastly, the study may provide empirical evidence on the importance of managing records from creation to disposition as a means to attaining the transparency and open governance agenda at M'mbelwa District Council and other related institutions. The study intended to suggest strategies that could be used to improve records management practice to enhance effective local government administration.

## **1.9 Scope and limitations of the study**

The study examined records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council. The study was restricted to administrative departments at M'mbelwa District Council. The study excluded other district councils and other public institutions in Malawi due to their scattered geographical

positions which would have made the researcher unable to manage collecting data from all of them, besides, the other public institutions were not part of the study's plan.

### **1.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented the introduction and background on records management practices in district councils and background to the area of study, the problem statement, the objectives, research questions, rationale and significance of the study, and the study's scope and limitations. The next chapter (Chapter Two) reviews literature in relation to objectives of this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an overview of literature on records management practices in public sectors such as local authorities. Literature review is “a description of literary works relevant to a particular area of study” (Ramdhani et al., 2014, as cited in Mutsagondo, 2021, p. 42). It is an integration of views, theories, hypotheses, methods and methodologies used by earlier scholars in their studies or research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) posit that a literature review helps to determine whether the topic is worth studying and it provides insight into ways in which the researcher can limit the scope to a needed area. Literature review helps a researcher to identify problems that need to be investigated.

Some types of literature review include narrative, meta-analysis, meta-synthesis and systematic (Dudovskiy, 2019). The primary purpose of a narrative literature review is to analyse and summarise a body of literature, to highlight new research streams, make historical narratives of issues, identify inconsistencies and gaps in the body of available knowledge (Dudovskiy, 2019). The major weakness of narrative literature review is that it heaps literature upon literature without systematic synthesis and integration of data in an informed manner (Mutsagondo, 2021) hence it was not used in this study. Meta-analysis literature review is usually highly standardised and thus, mostly used in quantitative studies, and usually comprises of numbers, frequencies and statistical figures (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). This was also not used in this study since the study is not highly structured. However, meta-synthesis literature review is non-statistical, and suitable for pure qualitative studies (Dudovskiy, 2019). O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) opine that meta-synthesis literature review integrates, evaluates and interprets findings of many qualitative studies and the focus is to have inductively-rich literature. Since the current study used a mixed methods approach, it did not use meta-synthesis literature review which is suitable for a qualitative study. Nevertheless, systematic literature review is dissimilar to other types of literature reviews as it is comprehensive, transparent and it is in line with pre-set criteria such as set objectives and research questions (Ramdhani et al., 2014, as cited in Mutsagondo, 2021). This study therefore employed systematic literature review because it is more rigorous than the

narrative literature review. It is not just a summary of sources consulted, but spells out the time-frame from which the literature was selected and is highly organised.

Sources used for research in the sciences, business, education, and other social science fields require more cutting-edge research, as these fields change quickly with the acquisition of new knowledge and the need to share it rapidly with practitioners in those fields, a good rule of thumb being to use sources published in the past 10 years (Southern New Hampshire University, 2023). To ensure that this study is informed by up-to-date records management practices, it has reviewed literature produced from 2015 to 2023. The scope of the literature surveyed covers both empirical and conceptual literature from masters' dissertations, doctoral theses, published books and journal articles, internet sources, conference papers, and government documents or policies. The researcher reviews the literature starting with the global perspectives and narrows it to the Malawian context. The literature is reviewed in line with study themes which include existing records management practices; records management policy framework; benefits of effective records management on service delivery; and factors contributing to effective records management.

## **2.2 Existing records management practices**

Records management practices involve the processes of identifying, classifying, and storing records, controlling access to records, as well as ensuring that retaining and disposing of the records are properly being done. Effective records management practices ensure that records are available for use when needed, privacy and confidentiality are maintained, redundant records are destroyed and records contribute towards sustaining service delivery (Jirata et al., 2018). The concepts of records creation and capture; storage and maintenance; access and security; and retention and disposal are discussed in the subsequent sections.

### **2.2.1 Records creation and capture**

Every organisation, including local authorities produce records in their daily business transactions. Records creation involves generating and keeping full and accurate records relating to work activities carried out, whenever there is a business need, legal requirement or expectation

(internal and external) for evidence and information (North Sydney Council, 2022). Capturing a record, on the other hand, means ensuring that the record, for example a receipt, contract or directive, becomes fixed so that it cannot be altered (Franks, 2018). It involves registering a record within the organisation's recordkeeping system, business system or any other official records repository. The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 15489-1 (2016) stipulates that an organisation needs to ensure an effective creation and capture of authentic, reliable and useable records. A qualitative study by Ginsberg (2016) in the United States of America (USA) used interviews to examine creation and capture of Federal Records in a digital environment. It was found that public offices in USA document actions and transactions through financial records, memoranda, minutes, emails, and reports captured in computers and Electronic Records Management Systems (ERMS) to prompt public access. Results were attributed to USA's public offices' response to memorandum issued by the then President of USA, Barak Obama on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 on "Managing government records" which demanded that all government agencies identify policies or programmes that could assist the agencies' efforts to improve public records management with particular focus on electronic records. Further, qualitative study by Frings-Hessami and Oliver (2022) investigated records creation and capture in government departments including municipalities in Switzerland and targeted seven archivists/records managers. Results from interviews indicate the availability of records management systems and registry functions in the municipalities that facilitated the capture of public records such as circulars, policy manuals, reports, requisitions, and correspondences using computers and scanners. These results were attributed to that around 40% of archivists and records managers working in state government departments and municipalities were qualified. However, the study did not indicate the government departments/municipalities for which the interviewees worked.

In Africa, a quantitative study by Molepo and Cloete (2017) investigated records creation and capture in Ga Molepo, South Africa. The results from questionnaires showed that records such as correspondences, instructions, and invoices were being created: Out of 100 respondents, nine (9%) indicated that official stamps were used to validate paper records, seven (7%) revealed that notebooks without carbon copies were used to capture records, six (6%) indicated the use of personal cellphones for e-records creation and capture, two (2%) indicated that official receipt books were seldom used and that they had computers and multifunctional printers for records



creation. Low usage of official receipt book implies that financial transactions between residents and traditional councils were not consistently recorded for proof of payment, and only two respondents having computers implies creation of manual handwritten records without virtual storage still dominated.

A quantitative study by Obulor et al. (2021) investigated records creation and capture in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government (OENLGA) Council, Nigeria. The study found that out of 183 respondents, 148 (80.1%) agreed that there were standard procedures for creation of records such as requisitions, correspondences, instructions, invoices, and appointment letters that were being captured using physical folders or using computers and scanners, and only 36 (19.6%) disagreed. These results are attributed to records management practices in OENLGA being at development level where systems for management of records are being partially implemented.

The reviewed literature shows that though some African countries are improving on records management practices in terms of records creation and capture in the local authorities, there are no known studies conducted on records creation and capture in M'belwa District Council. Therefore, this study intends to fill this gap by examining the existing records creation and capturing practices at M'belwa District Council.

### **2.2.2 Records storage and maintenance**

Records storage and maintenance plays a key role in ensuring that records remain accessible and usable for as long as they are required for business transactions and/or for research, evidential and historical purposes. Records storage means the placement of records according to plan, on a shelf or in a file drawer or saving an e-record (Read & Ginn, 2016, p. 118). International Council on Archives (as cited in Katekwe & Mutsagondo, 2017) opines that records maintenance involves retaining records for a period of time or for posterity as well as putting in place measures to retain their authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability. A quantitative study by Ali et al. (2021) assessed records storage and maintenance in Queensland state local councils in Australia. The study used questionnaires and found that out of 47 local councils, 42 (54.5%) indicated that cloud storage was not adopted, seven (9%) indicated that adoption of cloud storage was in pilot phase, 23 (29.1%) indicated some cloud storage adoption, and five (6.5%) indicated

full cloud storage adoption. The results show that there were no dedicated records storage facilities in most Queensland state local councils. However, these findings are in sharp contrast with those of a mixed methods study by Ali et al. (2020) which assessed information security risks in the cloud in Australian local government authorities. The results from interviews and questionnaires show that cloud computing was used for storing records and information in the Australian local government. This is evidenced by 369 (77%) participants who indicated that Cloud Service Providers (CSPs) and data centres provided greater records information security during data storage, and 360 (75%) participants pointed out that CSPs and data centres had effective back-up systems. These results are ascribed to Australia's advanced technological developments which enabled the local government to use cloud computing effectively and efficiently in managing e-records. Relatedly, a quantitative study by Xiao et al. (2021) investigated the impact of indoor climate conditions in 34 provincial, municipal, and district archives in Wuhan, China. It was found that 17 (50%) of the archives had protective devices for records from temperature and relative humidity; water protection, 15 (44.1%); fire protection, 15 (44.1%); dust protection, 15 (44.1%); ultraviolet protection, 13 (38.2%); radiation protection, 12 (35.3%); earth quake prevention, 9 (26.5%); and harmful gas prevention, 9 (26.5%). Under the above controlled conditions, records were markedly protected from impact of severe indoor climatic conditions, on the other hand, some records' permanence was affected due to uncontrolled regime which they had been exposed to.

Similarly, there are studies about Africa on records storage and maintenance. For instance, a qualitative study by Sigauke (2022) examined storage of digital records in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe. It was revealed through interviews that, while having central repositories for paper records, ten government departments that participated in the study did not have central repositories for the storage of digital records. Digital records were stored in the business units whose functions generated the records. This entails that digital records at Manicaland Province are not managed from a central point. A mixed methods study by Calvin (2018) investigated the preservation and conservation of teachers' records at Mbale Local Government in Uganda. Interview and questionnaire results show that registry personnel stored teachers' records using a centralised storage system where records for several departments were in one central location and generally under control of the district records manager with his team. While they were applauded for having a centralised storage system, Calvin (2018) found that records were stored

in boxes, some placed on shelves, metallic filing cabinets, open cupboards, tables and others dropped on the ground in offices or corridors due to poor paper records management practices at Mbale Local Government. Additionally, a mixed methods study by Marwa (2015) investigated the preservation of records at Temeke Municipal Council (TMC), in Tanzania by using interviews, questionnaires and observation. The study found that offices were congested with files with some spreading on the floor. It was observed that all records offices lacked air conditioning machines and dehumidifiers to regulate the levels of both temperatures and relative humidity. These results clearly indicate that records at TMC were preserved in conditions that were neither controlled nor managed as required probably due to lack of resources.

Further, a descriptive survey study in West Africa by Bakare et al. (2016) assessed records storage and maintenance in some selected local government councils in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study used questionnaires and found that computers constituted records storage facilities where 23 (31.9%) of the respondents who indicated this, were from Ikenne, 20 (31.8%) from Sagamu, and eight (20%) from Remo North. CDRoms, and flash drives were also used for records storage with four (8.5%) from Ikenne, three (7.5%) from Remo North, and three (4.7%) from Sagamu indicating the use of CDRoms for storage; while one (2.5%) from Remo North, two (3.2%) from Sagamu, and one (2.1%) from Ikenne indicated the use of flash drives for storage. An off-site storage facility was not being used as a storage medium in the councils studied. This situation shows that the councils were not proactive in their records management practices, thus exposing their records to disasters. The studies reviewed show availability of literature on the topic under study. However, no known study on records storage and maintenance has been done at M'mbelwa District Council and it is for this reason that this study investigates the storage and maintenance of records at M'mbelwa District Council.

### **2.2.3 Records access and security**

Records in local authorities must be protected to ensure that they remain accessible whenever they are required. As stipulated by ISO 15489-1 (2016), there should be a set of rules to identify rights of access and the regime of permissions and restrictions applicable to records. Records access involves the usage of controls to identify users and grant certain privileges to records, information, systems or resources (Franks, 2018). On the other hand, records security has been

defined as “the quality or state of being secure or to be free from risk” (Whitman, 2015, p. 12). A study by Xiao et al. (2021) in China found that there were controls provided for records that are only accessible by authorised personnel as it was indicated that access control manners were accepted by 27 (79.4%) of the 34 surveyed archives. Further, digital signature and identity authentication technology were used by 20 (58.5%) of the surveyed archives. It was also found that a total of 25 (72.8%) of the surveyed archives chose more than four backup methods. However, most archives backup data content only, ignoring the backup of applications and software and hardware systems. Additionally, methods used in accessing records included in-person access to records during business hours, where information seekers visit registry office during business hours and ask for records; in-person access to records by appointment, where information seekers book appointment from authorities before accessing records from the registry office; open access records requests; and online access. These results are ascribed to the fact that local authorities in China have provided a control mechanism which ensures a precautionary action so that records with sensitive information and confidential in nature are securely protected. Ali et al. (2021) also assessed records access and security in 47 Queensland state local councils in Australia. The study found that records in the local councils were being accessed through in-person access during business hours, in-person access to records by appointment, and online access to digitised records. The results are attributed to that most repositories still maintained physical facilities offering physical access to records.

In Africa, a study by Marwa (2015) also revealed that most records offices at TMC in Tanzania had grills on their entrances which were securely padlocked whenever the rooms were not in use. Some weaknesses, however, were observed as the study further found that windows to some records offices had no grills and some of the records were placed quite near these unsecured windows exposing them to vandalism and theft. Marwa (2015) further found that all records offices at the Council had no firefighting equipment such as fire extinguishers or sand buckets. The results show that the state of records security at TMC was not satisfactory and created loopholes that could compromise the security of records.

A qualitative study by Magama (2018) also examined the security and privacy of records in public departments in Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe. The study collected data from 13 departments using interviews, observation, and document analysis. It was revealed that there was deletion of records in six (46%) of the departments, migration errors in four (38.5%) of the

departments, unauthorised access, and that files were left open on shared client computers in three (23%) of the departments, viruses and crashing of machines were discovered in two (15%) of the departments, hacking one (7.7%), and technological obsolescence one (7.7%). The prevalence of these challenges could be due to the fact that the departments were running hybrid records systems. A study by Malanga and Kamanga (2019) that used quantitative methods to investigate access and security of e-records at Karonga District Council in Malawi found that, 25 (44.6%) of the respondents said access to e-records was average, and that 29 (51.8%), indicated that e-records security measures were average. Average access to e-records at Karonga District Council signifies that some e-records are not readily accessible which makes it difficult for the Council to meet the requirement of Malawi's Access to Information Act of 2017, Section 5 (1) which indicates that "a person shall have the right to access information in so far as such information is required for the exercise of his rights, which is in the custody, or under control of a public body" (Access to Information Act, 2017, p. 5).

The studies above indicate different records access and security measures applied in various local authorities. It was therefore imperative to investigate the records access and security measures being used at M'mbelwa District Council.

#### **2.2.4 Retention and disposal of records**

Local governments have different records retention and disposition periods. Records retention means methods and practices organisations use to maintain important records for a required period of time for administrative, financial, legal, and historical purposes (Franks, 2018). Records disposition, on the other hand, is the final destination of records after they have reached the end of their retention period in active and/or inactive storage (Read & Ginn, 2016, p.170). A qualitative study by Frings-Hessami and Oliver (2022) investigated retention and disposal of records in government departments including municipalities in Switzerland. It was found that there was no official policy to eliminate both paper and electronic records and that records were not regularly transferred to the state archives. The results were attributed to the fact that top management was not interested in pushing for change because records management issue was not considered important. A quantitative study by Franks (2015) investigated records retention and disposition in cloud computing services in Canadian institutions including local authorities.

The study used interviews to collect data from the targeted nine cloud computing services representatives. Results established that six (71.4 %) respondents indicated that cloud computing services allowed retention periods to be applied, and destruction was automated in four (47.6 %) of the cloud computing services studied. The results of the study further revealed that seven (76.1%) of cloud computing services studied allowed records to be deleted according to a retention and disposition schedule, and five (52.4 %) cloud computing services allowed backups to be deleted according to the retention and disposition schedule. The results show availability of retention and disposal schedules in institutions studied.

Makgahlela (2021) used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the existence of records retention and disposal schedules in selected municipalities in Limpopo Province of South Africa. The study used questionnaires and interviews to collect data from 86 municipalities' employees. It was found that 86 (100%) respondents indicated the availability of retention and disposal schedules in municipalities studied. However, the study further found that 68 (79%) respondents revealed that their disposal programme was not informed by retention and disposal schedules that were in existence. The above study results indicate that there is still a gap that needs to be filled on records retention and disposition in the studied municipalities. Similarly, a mixed methods study by Malatji and Marutha (2023) at Limpopo provincial government of South Africa revealed through document analysis that records retention and disposition schedule was available. It was further revealed that the schedule had symbols with various meanings such as "AP" meaning "records can remain in the custody of the body indefinitely", "A" and "D" indicating "archive" and "destroy" respectively, and "A20" meaning "transfer to archives repository 20 years after the end of the year in which the records were created." This shows that Limpopo provincial government was organised in terms of records retention and disposition. In Malawi, such studies are not known, however, Access to information Act of 2017, Section 13 (3-4) indicates that every information holder shall maintain information for a period of seven years from the date which the information is generated by the institution or on which the information comes under its custody or control and at the expiration of seven years, the information holder shall transfer the information to National Archives (Access to Information Act, 2017). This study, therefore, intends to fill the gap by examining the retention and disposal of records at M'mbelwa District Council.

From the literature reviewed on records creation and capture; storage and maintenance; access and security; and retention and disposal, it could be concluded that records management practices in Africa is poor. This researcher does, however, take note of the trends that have taken place in some countries, particularly in South Africa, with regards to the improvement in records management practices. More research is needed to provide schedule and practical interventions to improve records management not only in district councils in Malawi but also other public offices across the world. This study intends to address this gap by answering the first research question: What are the existing records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council?

### **2.3 Existence of records management policy framework**

Effective management of records in whatever format requires local authorities to put in place mechanisms in the form of policy, plans and guidelines that would guide personnel. Kennedy and Schauder (as cited in Ongwenyi et al., 2018, p. 4) define records management policy as the official charter for performing all records management functions. Dunlop (2022) describes records management plans as arrangements showing effective, efficient and systemic control of the creation, storage, retrieval, maintenance, use and disposal of records including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence. Further, records management guidelines are notes for good practice to show staff how to create, capture and record metadata for records in their care to ensure a consistent method is employed across the institution (Royal Veterinary College, 2015). According to ISO 15489-1 (2016) the policy, plans and guidelines should support the fulfilment of requirements for the creation, capture and management of records and the design, use and management of records systems. ISO 15489-1 (2016) also opines that records management policy and guidelines should be derived from business objectives and supported by business rules or procedures for managing records. Western Australian Auditor General (2019) found that 137 (100%) Local Governments (LGs) had recordkeeping plans approved by the State Records Commission, as required. However, the four of the LGs reviewed were not effectively implementing the plans. This was due to lack of records management expertism by those managing records in some of the LGs. A study by Xiao et al. (2021) in provincial, municipal, and district archives in Wuhan, China found that, of the 34 surveyed archives, 16 (47.1%), 10 (29.4%) and five (14.7%) developed long-term (more than ten years), medium-term (three to five years) and short-term (less than three years) work plans for records preservation, respectively.

However, a total of six (17.7%) of the surveyed archives did not have any work plan for electronic records preservation. This means that the surveyed institutions archives need to improve on the preservation of records. A study by Ginsberg (2016) found that federal records were admirably managed to initiate aspects of records management practices such as policy and guidelines. These results were attributed to USA public records being managed by competent staff and that there was political will from top officials as evidenced by a memorandum regarding records management that President Barack Obama issued in November 2011.

In Africa, a mixed methods study by Makwae (2021) at Garissa County in Kenya found that out of 22 Human Resource Management Officers (HRMO) and Personnel Records Management Assistants (PRMA), 20 (92%) indicated that draft policy was available awaiting review and final approval. Further, out of 55 subordinate staff, 41 (75%) agreed on the availability of draft policy. Failure to know the availability of a policy by some employees signifies lack of awareness of the records management standards, meaning that the staffs are not aware of their responsibilities towards the management of the County's records. A qualitative study by Kashaija (2022) at Singida Municipal Council (SMC) in Tanzania found that there was no written records policy, procedures, and guidelines to manage both paper and electronic records at the SMC. Records management personnel were therefore using normal procedures of handling files. However, a survey study by Adusei and Senyah (2022) that examined the existence of policy, plans and guidelines for records management in the local governments of Ghana through use of questionnaires found that the highest mean score rank was 8.72 (84%) of respondents confirming the existence of policies and procedures for creating and storing records at Offinso Municipal Assembly (OMA). A mean score of 2.26 (75%) indicated that management had come out with procedures on the frequency of filing OMA office documents. Further, a mixed methods study by Malatji and Marutha (2023) at Limpopo provincial government in South Africa revealed through document analysis that all departments had file plans, records management policies, and registry procedure manuals. This shows that there were some forms of instructions and guidelines on how and when office documents should be filed in Ghana and South Africa.

Some studies reviewed above indicate that some government agencies in Africa continue to operate without policies, plans and guidelines or if they exist, they are often weak or outdated. Organisations that operate without these tools will have inadequate or ineffective management of records. No known study on records policy, plans and guidelines has been done at M'belwa



District Council. It is against this background that this study intends to address the second research question: What policy framework is governing records management at M'mbelwa District Council?

#### **2.4 Benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery**

There exists a connection between public records management and government service delivery. Eigema (as cited in Makgahlela, 2020) indicates that effective service delivery is when a government agency or department strives to provide efficient services that are accessible, of high quality, standard and value for human dignity. Ali et. al. (2020) investigated benefits of effective records management on service delivery in Australian local governments. The study found that records provided critical information to identify service-oriented solutions to improve performance focusing on driving efficiency, improved service delivery, and enhancing the end user service experience. This was possible because the Australian Government valued records management and had a Cloud Policy guiding e-records management. A qualitative study by Mukred, et al. (2016) used interviews to investigate benefits of effective records management on service delivery in public institutions in Yemen. The study established that ERMSs available in public institutions in Yemen ensured systematic and efficient flow of records that enabled public officials to perform their functions successfully and efficiently. This is because records form the basis for the formulation of policies, plans and making informed decisions. These results were attributed to the up-to-date and accurate records keeping system.

Similarly, a qualitative study by Makgahlela (2020) interviewed 35 employees to determine benefits of effective records management on service delivery at Mogale City Local Municipality in South Africa. The study found that 26 (76%) of the participants indicated that records management was key to fostering enhanced service delivery, six (17%) participants explained that inaccessibility of records occasionally pressured officials and management to make uninformed decisions regarding service delivery allocations, three (8%) of the participants indicated that records cannot ultimately enhance and solve challenges of service delivery. Some participants who agreed confirmed that the municipality had sometimes experienced delays in dealing with residents' queries due to the unavailability of information. The results show that records management was directly linked to service delivery.

A quantitative study by Mamoti and King (2021) targeted 162 senior managers and investigated benefits of effective records management on service delivery at Western Cape governmental bodies including municipalities in South Africa. The findings of the study revealed that all 162 (100%) respondents had used performance information to make revenue collection and business regulations plans and policies, 143 (87%) had used research reports, 69 (41%) indicated that they had used the opinions of experienced staff, 33 (20%) used service delivery protests reports, and 30 (18%) had used media reports. The results explain the existence of a positive relationship between records management and service delivery at Western Cape. A study by Marwa (2015) at TMC, Tanzania also found that five (100%) respondents in the management team were of the opinion that the poor state of records had impacted negatively on the Council's day-to-day activities. These results led to delays in decision making which in turn undermined service delivery at the Council.

The studies reviewed above have shown that there are benefits of effective records management on service delivery. The studies show that the biggest challenge for people seeking a particular service in public institutions is not necessarily impediments caused by dysfunctional structures, but the lack of records to support citizens' claims or inability by public officers to timely track files and provide relevant information to clients on time. These studies show the availability of literature on the benefits of effective records management on service delivery. This dissertation makes use of this knowledge from literature to respond to the third research question: What are the benefits of effective records management on service delivery at M'mbelwa District Council?

## **2.5 Factors contributing to effective records management**

Records management in local authorities can be affected by a number of factors. This section reviewed literature on some factors contributing to effective records management. These factors include knowledge of staff, staff competences and skills, infrastructure available, and top management support.

### **2.5.1 Knowledge about records management practices**

Employees in any institution are supposed to be knowledgeable about records management practices. A study by Xiao et al. (2021) investigated the knowledge of records personnel in local

authorities in Wuhan, China and found that 22 (64.7%) of the 34 surveyed archives' staff had knowledge on records management which they obtained through on-the-job training and seminars. The results entail that most of the staff at Wuhan did not have significant records management knowledge before joining the archives field. These findings concur with the findings of a study by Ali et al. (2021) in local councils in Australia which found that out of 480 respondents, 475 (99%) had records management knowledge which they attained through trainings they received ranging from high-level, introductory sessions, workshop-based, and formal. These results show that top management in Australian local councils supported training activities for records management personnel.

In Africa, a mixed methods study by Thanye et al. (2015) which used questionnaires and interviews to assess knowledge of staff in records management at the Gaborone City Council (GCC) in Botswana revealed that all nine (100%) records staff had knowledge which they obtained through formal training. Calvin (2018) also found that most staff members at Mbale Local Government in Uganda were knowledgeable of records management practices through on-the-job training. These results show that there is support for records management training in Botswana and Uganda. However, little is known about knowledge of staff in records management practices at M'belwa District Council. Therefore, this study intends to investigate knowledge of staff in records management practices at M'belwa District Council.

### **2.5.2 Staff competencies and skills in records management**

The officers that handle records are supposed to be skilled and competent to ensure smooth management of records. A qualitative study by Shepherd et al. (2019) investigated employees' skills in records management in public sector including local government in England. The study found that the interviewed participants ranked themselves as highly skilled in records management activities such as records organisation, appraisal, access, survey, retention, and disposition. The results are attributed to the fact that local authorities in England took different radical approaches to deliver open data function to the public. Similarly, a qualitative study by Gibbons and Douglas (2021) found that adverts for records management personnel in Australian public authorities including local authorities required employees to have qualifications such as certificate, diploma and degree in records and archives management or information sciences.

Further, employees were supposed to be skilled in records organisation, appraisal, survey, records registration, filing, retention, digitisation, preservation, and disposition. These findings were attributed to the investment the records management professional associations had made in developing competencies of staff to support accredited education and training in records and archives management.

A qualitative study by Netshakhuma (2019) used interviews and document analysis to investigate employees' possession of records management skills at Mpumalanga Provincial Government Municipalities, South Africa. The results indicated that most of the archivists and records managers lacked skills in systematic observation and documentation, file formats and application, conducting records appraisals in the electronic environment, digital preservation, migration between operating systems and across hardware, disaster preparedness, metadata standards (technical, administrative, structural, descriptive) among others. The results entail archivists in Mpumalanga Provincial Government Municipalities lacked proper training in records and archives management. Similarly, a qualitative study by Sigauke (2022) examined skills of employees in digital records environment in the public sector in Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe and found that all 27 (100%) respondents interviewed indicated that they lacked the practical skills required in the creation, capture, metadata management, classification, storage, disposal, and preservation of digital records as well as basic ICT skills required in the management of digital records. These results are attributed to the fact that employees at Manicaland Province did not receive any training in records management. On qualifications of records management staff, a study by Thanye et al. (2015) at Gaborone City Council indicated that five technicians (55.5%) had diplomas in records and archives management, three (33%) were artisans holding certificates in records and archives management, and one (11%) had a degree in library and information studies. These results imply that some staff members managing records in the above studied departments did not have the competencies required for records management. These studies indicate the availability of literature on competences of records staff in records management practices, however, no known study has been conducted at M'mbelwa District Council on this topic. It was therefore imperative to investigate competences and skills of those managing records at M'mbelwa District Council.

### **2.5.3 Infrastructure available for records management**

Availability of infrastructure is another factor that contributes to effective records management. Xiao et al. (2021) found that some non-ICT infrastructure such as boxes, shelves, and metallic filing cabinets were available in all 34 surveyed archives in local authorities in Wuhan, China. Further, 30 (88.2%) of the surveyed archives were equipped with records management and information sharing systems such as Electronic Records Management System. These findings were attributed to the fact that China recognises the role records play in good governance. A related mixed methods study by Gupta and Bukhari (2022) investigated the availability of records management infrastructure at Jammu Region Local Authorities in India. It was found that both ICT and non-ICT infrastructure such as shelves, filing cabinets, Internet, computers, photocopiers, and scanners were available. However, the results indicated that knowledge on the usage of the ICT-infrastructures was still limited.

In Southern Africa, a mixed methods study by Motlhasedi (2022) used questionnaires, interviews and document analysis to investigate availability and condition of ICT facilities at Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development Department (MLGRD) in Botswana. The study revealed that there was poor network connectivity and obsolete hardware and software at MLGRD. Relatedly, a study by Kashaija (2022) found that computers, internet connection, printers and scanners were available at Singida Municipal Council but were found in few offices. There was lack of computers, internet connection, printers, and scanners in the records office. A study by Calvin (2018) found that non-ICT infrastructure such as boxes, shelves, metallic filing cabinets, open cupboards, and tables were available at Mbale Local Government in Uganda. Relatedly, Makgahlela (2021) also found that filing cabinets, shelves, and boxes were available in the selected municipalities in Limpopo Province of South Africa. The results show that both ICT and non-ICT infrastructures though available, are inadequate and are poorly distributed in some local authorities reviewed above.

Though the studies reviewed above show availability of literature on records management infrastructure, no known study on the presence of records management infrastructure at M'mbelwa District Council has been done, hence this study intends to fill that gap.

#### **2.5.4 Top management support for records management**

According to literature, another factor that contributes to effective records management is top management support. Phiri and Tough (2018) specified the concept of management support into four sections: Firstly, provision of specific budget lines for records management activities, secondly, effective endorsement of records management projects, thirdly, approval of formal policies for records keeping, and fourthly, funding of specialist records keeping training. A study by Xiao et al. (2021) in provincial, municipal, and district archives in Wuhan, China noted some positive aspects of senior management support towards records management, projects being directly instigated and funded, as well as records management practices changes proposed by information managers being facilitated. This was attributed to the fact that records management activities were deemed as front-line issues in China. A study by Gupta and Bukhari (2022) at Jammu Region Local Authorities in India found that there was lack of senior management support which hampered the endorsement of policies, the instigation of records management training, and the initiation of electronic records management strategies. Lack of management support was attributed to India's less attention towards records management activities.

Some studies have indicated that top management in some institutions were not adequately financing records management programmes. Gupta and Bukhari (2022) found that local authority archives in India did not have adequate funding. Similarly, Mukred et al. (2016) found that financial support was lacking amongst the public institutions including local authorities in Yemen. The results further indicated that there was a lack of incentive payments and the financial resources to secure infrastructure and equipment, technical assistance, and maintenance. This shows why there was slow adoption of ICTs and low records management standards and practices in public institutions in Yemen.

In Africa, a mixed methods study by Ongwenyi et al. (2018) that used both questionnaires and interviews on 22 Nairobi City County employees in Kenya found that top management support on the use of ICTs to support management of records at Nairobi City County was poor. These results show that departments in Kenyan counties do not accord records management the status it deserves. Bakare et al. (2016) also assessed funding for local government councils in Nigeria and found that the problem of inadequate finance was most pronounced in Sagamu 24 (38.1%), followed by Remo North 10 (25%) and then Ikenne 15 (21.3%) respectively. This was attributed to the absence of a management plan for funding records management activities. Poor funding

was also observed in various studies (Edmond, 2015; Makwae, 2021; Makgahlela, 2021). Poor funding of records management activities in the studies above negatively affected records management practices.

The studies reviewed in this section show availability of literature on factors contributing to effective records management. Literature however shows that little is known on the factors contributing to effective records management in the Malawian local authorities. It is for this reason that the study intends to address this gap by answering the fourth research question: What are the factors contributing to effective records management at M'mbelwa District Council?

## **2.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter provided a review of the empirical and descriptive literature from different parts of the world on the topic under study. The literature revealed that the role played by records management has been recognised worldwide albeit to different extents. The next chapter discusses theoretical framework that will be used in this study and its justification.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Theoretical framework guides researchers on what is going on, what has to be done and how it should be done (Cohen et. al., 2018). A theory and a model are two related but distinct terms (Pediaa, 2017). Theories are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomena, and in many cases to challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumption (University of Southern California, 2017). A model, on the other hand, describes how the concepts in theory are related to each other, often presented in diagrammatical form to help the reader to visualise what is implied in a theory which it represents (Chaputula, 2016). This study used Records Continuum Model (RCM) to investigate records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council in the Northern Region of Malawi with a view to promote transparency, open governance, so that service delivery can be enhanced. The rationale for choosing this model as well as the shortcomings of other models are presented. The following specific objectives were addressed in this study:

- To establish the existing records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council.
- To examine the existence of policy framework governing records management at M'mbelwa District Council.
- To establish the benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery at M'mbelwa District Council.
- To investigate factors that contribute to effective records management at M'mbelwa District Council.

Lederman and Lederman (2015) hold that every type of research should have a theoretical framework. A theoretical framework is the starting point of research since it puts the research in context and guides the researcher to form opinions and conclusions (Makgahlela, 2021). It is, therefore, vital that research projects are underpinned by theoretical frameworks from which the researcher can draw conclusions and put the research into context. A theoretical framework brings thoroughness and rigour in research and can link elements of research findings to yield results that are compatible with a broader outline of other studies (Stewart & Klein, 2016). Maxwell (as cited in Legodi, 2021) opines that theoretical framework shapes what is looked at,



how it is thought of, and shows how the current research fits into the already known and contributes on the topic to the field (its intellectual goals).

A number of models such as International Council on Archives (ICA) Electronic Records Management Model, National Archives of Australia Records Management Model, National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Model, Public Record Office Model, Victorian Electronic Records Strategy (VERS) Model, University of Pittsburgh Electronic Records Management Model, Records Life-cycle Model (RLCM), Records Continuum Model (RCM), are used in records management (Kemon, 2007, as cited in Makgahlela, 2021). These varied views of models show the necessity for a close examination of the specific research environment before selecting one (or more) model(s) considered appropriate for underpinning a study. Records management models have helped researchers to understand the way records are created, preserved, classified, organised and managed in organisations. Consequently, to achieve the purpose of this study, the study was underpinned by the Records Continuum Model. This research discusses some of the models used in the field before discussing the model underpinning this study. Victorian Electronic Records Strategy Model, Records Life Cycle Model, and Records Continuum Model are therefore discussed in the subsequent sections.

### **3.2 Victorian Electronic Records Strategy Model**

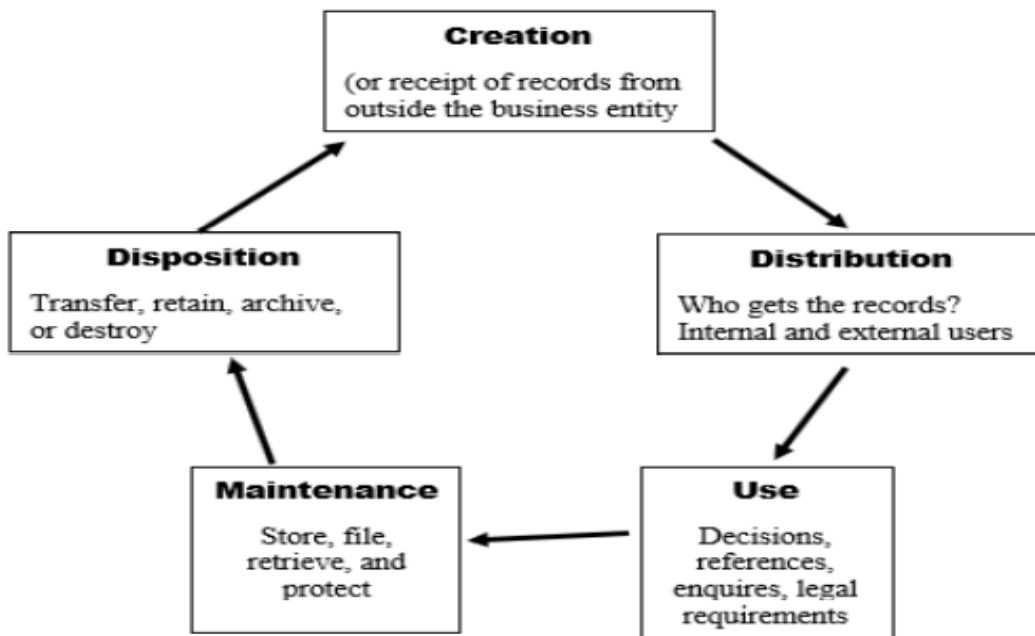
Victorian Electronic Records Strategy Model (VERS) is a records management framework developed for the State Archives of Victoria, Australia. VERS was formed in 1995 by the Public Record Office of Victoria in response to the test of preserving electronic records (e-records) produced by Victorian Government agencies (Makgahlela, 2021). VERS was designed to preserve e-records for very long periods (Waugh, 2006, as cited in Makgahlela, 2021). The long-term management of e-records is an enormous challenge for any organisation where records must be kept for longer periods, and the VERS is a leading model that comprehensively addresses this challenge. While the bulk of the records created in district councils are electronic, paper-based records are also generated. Therefore, VERS Model is not able to deal with both electronic and paper records. A further crucial point against the adoption of the VERS Model as a framework for this study is that the preservation and management of e-records are critically technology dependent (Makgahlela, 2021). This is not a problem in a developed country such as

Australia. In contrast, the infrastructure and technologies needed for the model are simply not found in most local authorities in Malawi given its rural nature. Thus, after careful consideration, this model was found to be inapplicable to the current study and therefore not used.

### **3.3 The Records Life Cycle Model**

Records Life Cycle Model (RLCM) was developed by Brooks and Leahy in 1930s in the USA (Chaterera, 2016). Using a birth-to death analogy, the RLCM describes the records as passing through a series of stages (Mutsagondo, 2021). Thus, the keeping and management of records is often organised around a life cycle that all records should follow (Seniwoliba et al., 2017). The RLCM sees records as passing through three clear stages: active, semi-active, and nonactive, where the active stage involves the generation, dissemination and use as well as storage and maintenance of a record (Mnjama & Lowry, 2017). Similarly, records in the district councils are born (creation phase), live (maintenance and use phase) and die (disposition phase). Most lifecycle models aim to show a progression of actions taken at different times in the life cycle of a record, typically, its creation, capture, storage, use and disposal. Other scholars such as Shepherd and Yeo (as cited in Phiri, 2016) indicate that some writers showed the life of records as a linear progression while others describe a loop or a circle. Figure 3.1 illustrates the RLCM adopted from Luyombya and Ndagire (2020). This RLCM is aimed at showing actions taken in the life of a record; typically, its creation, distribution, use, maintenance, and disposition.

Creation, which is the first phase of a record life cycle, occurs when records are received or created. In the context of this study, the creation phase of records in the district council is when records are created or received in various council departments. This also involves the sorting and filing of records which are then transferred to a records centre and made ready for access.



**Figure 3.1: Records Life Cycle Model (RLCM) Source: (Luyombya & Ndagire, 2020)**

The second phase in RLCM is that records will be distributed to the persons responsible for their use. These records can be distributed to employees within the district council or other external users. Usage of the records is the third phase of the RLCM. A district council will use the records in decision-making and meeting legal requirements by referring to them in answering queries.

Maintenance (fourth phase) of the records will be required while records are in use and afterwards (Makgahlela, 2021). A district council will protect the records against both environmental and human interferences so that the information they carry is secure. Council will then store the records to preserve their integrity. At the disposal stage (final phase), the district council will destroy some records in accordance with consistent and documented disposal procedures while those to be stored longer, such as policies and contracts, will be transferred to the archives by following archival procedures.

A district council that applies RLCM can easily determine whether the procedures required to manage records are developed. However, RLCM's major shortcoming has been its inability to accommodate e-records (Makgahlela, 2020). RLCM was used in other similar studies, such as legal frameworks for personnel records management in support of accountability in devolved governments: A case of Garissa County Government (Makwae, 2021), and enhancing service

delivery through records management in Mogale City Local Municipality (Makgahlela, 2020). This study, therefore, perceives the RLCM as the starting point for creating an effective records management programme because it allows the development of appropriate tools, systems and procedures to appropriately manage each phase of the life of a record (Maseh, 2015). The other strength is that RLCM fits into paper-based records management because its fundamental assumptions underpinned the paper record environment (Matlala & Maphoto, 2020). However, RLCM was not used in this study because it does not provide clear guidelines in a hybrid records environment.

### 3.4 Records Continuum Model

The Records Continuum Model (RCM) was developed in the mid-1990s by Frank Upward (Maseh, 2015). The theory rose to prominence following revelations that the records lifecycle concept was not suitable in providing a framework for the management of the e-records (Mutsagondo, 2021). RCM was used in this study because it guides management of both paper and electronic records. Central to this study, are the four dimensions of the records continuum model, namely, create, capture, organise and pluralise. Figure 3.2 illustrates the RCM.

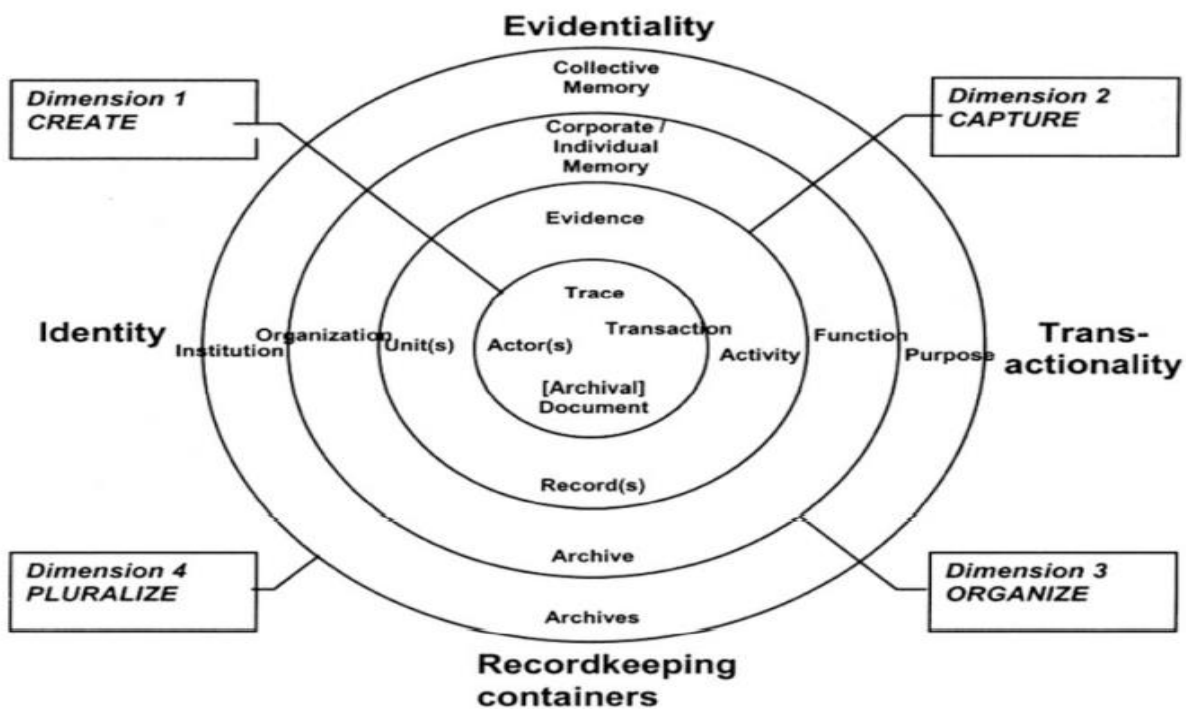


Figure 3.2: The Records Continuum Model (RCM) Source: (Musembe, 2016)

In the “create” (creation and receipt) dimension, Huvila et al. (as cited in Mutsagondo, 2021) opine that an organisation generates records for administrative purposes and in support of its day-to-day work. This involves actor/actors who are creators of the record as indicated in identity axis (Daffus, 2016). When applied to this study, constructs from the model will help to support the fact that managing records is a collaborative effort of many officers within a district council, since many of these officers actively engage in generating, receiving and using records. In the “capture” (capture and classification) dimension, an organisation enters records into its record-keeping system where they are kept as evidence of some transaction that took place during their creation (Joanne, et. al., 2017). This involves recording the activities and the context in which transactions take place as portrayed in the transactionality axis (Daffus, 2016). The “capture” construct is relevant to the study as it places an obligation on district council officers to make sure records of value are captured into the record-keeping system.

In the “organise” (organise, use and maintain) dimension, an organisation ensures that records are given the necessary elements such as metadata so that they will be available over time (Mutsagondo, 2021). This includes organisation of corporate and personal memory to maintain evidentiality. Issues of safe storage, controlled use and preservation come in under this dimension. The “organise” dimension implores upon officers in a district council to arrange, use and maintain records of value contextually in a manner that makes it relevant and comprehensible in wider government business. In the last dimension, “pluralise”, a record created by an organisation as part of an individual transaction becomes evidence of broader societal trends, as the record, or the archive, is used by wider society and by different stakeholders (Makgahlela, 2021). The record moves from being individual or corporate memory to become collective societal memory and thus becomes pluralised as collective archives (Makgahlela, 2021). Thus, the “pluralise” dimension implores upon officers in a district council to manage records professionally for the benefit of central government presently and the country at large in future.

Upward (as cited in Alegbeleye & Chilaka, 2019) argues that the strength of RCM is that it indicates that record keeping is a continuing and rolling process that does not separate the life of records in time and space. RCM also has particular focus on processes and activities, rather than on the records and their status, hence making it valuable within the electronic environment where systems are centre point (Daffus, 2016). The major drawback with the RCM is that the model

proves efficient only when there is a high level of collaboration between records managers and records archivists (Daffus, 2016). Otherwise, records may get lost in the subsystems due to lack of records management and archival knowledge on the part of corporate information systems designers (Seniwoliba et al., 2017). Further, Piggott (as cited in Karabinos, 2018) states that the core texts of RCM are not always easy to understand, even those well versed in the professional literature sometimes struggle to comprehend the intended meaning of RCM writing. Piggott (as cited in Karabinos, 2018, p. 209) notes the RCMS's inability to describe the role of records and recordkeeping in society and calls the RCM an "abstraction," one which must "take its chances" due to its reliance "on the viewer to draw a correct inference." Despite these weaknesses, the RCM was used in this study because it is the only model which can be used in managing both paper and electronic records. The RCM had also been used in similar studies such as those of Makgahlela (2021) "records management practices in selected municipalities in Limpopo Province of South Africa" and Marwa (2015), "records preservation practices at Temeke Municipal Council, Dar es Salaam-Tanzania."

The constructs/variables of the RCM are matched with the research questions of the study in order to conceptualise such variables and provide a basis for understanding the dynamics of the theme of the study as illustrated in Table 3.1. Literature has also been used as source of variables to fill the gaps that RCM constructs might not address.

**Table 3.1: Mapping research questions and variables onto the sources of variables**

S/No.	Research questions	Key variables addressed	Sources of variables
1	What are the existing records management practices at M’mbelwa District Council?	Create, Capture, Organise, Pluralise, Store, Use, Maintain, Appraise, Dispose, Preserve	Records Continuum Model
		Archive	Literature
2	What policy framework is governing records management at M’mbelwa District Council?	Policy, Plans, Guidelines	Records Continuum Model
		Responsibilities	Literature
3	What are the benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery at M’mbelwa District Council?	Utilisation, Pluralisation, Evidence, Collective memory, Societal memory	Records Continuum Model
		Decision making, Service delivery	Literature
4	What are the factors contributing to effective records management at M’mbelwa District Council?	Records management knowledge, Competencies, Top management support,	Literature
		Infrastructure, Staff skills in; creation, capturing, organising, storage, usage, appraisal, disposal, preservation	Records Continuum Model

### 3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented and comparatively discussed three common models in records management. These act as benchmarks to uncover gaps in records management practices in public institutions. The chapter also justified the adoption of the RCM owing to its suitability in the hybrid records environment. For clarity, the research questions that addressed the topic of study were matched with the variables of RCM and literature. The next chapter (Chapter Four) discusses the methodology that was used in this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Research methodology is an indispensable part of research. It is a set of systematic techniques and tools used in research in the course of looking for answers to address a research problem (Cohen et al., 2018). To recap, the main aim of the study was to investigate records management practices at M’mbelwa District Council in the Northern Region of Malawi. The researcher came up with four research questions that guided the study in accomplishing the main aim as follows:

- What are the existing records management practices at M’mbelwa District Council?
- What policy framework is governing records management at M’mbelwa District Council?
- What are the benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery at M’mbelwa District Council?
- What are the factors contributing to effective records management at M’mbelwa District Council?

#### **4.2 Research paradigm**

Research paradigm is a basic orientation to theory or an organising framework for theory or a whole system of thinking (Cohen et al., 2018). Paradigm differences influence how researchers know, their interpretation of reality and their values and methodology in research. Major paradigms in social sciences research are positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, transformative, and pragmatism (Creswell, 2014). This study was underpinned by the pragmatism research paradigm.

##### **4.2.1 Positivism**

The epistemological view in quantitative studies is positivism (Mutsagondo, 2021). For positivists, knowledge is real as the world around us is real and observable through empiricism (use of sensory experience) and rationalism (use of deductive and inductive reasoning) (Creswell, 2014). In positivism, the researcher is considered independent and objective using



larger samples to test carefully constructed hypothesis (Cohen et al., 2018). According to Williamson and Johanson (2018), positivists value facts and objectivity and hold that reality exists and can be easily discovered. Post-positivism represents thinking after positivism, challenging the traditional notion of the absolute truth of knowledge and recognising that we cannot be positive about our claims of knowledge when studying the behaviour and actions of humans (Creswell, 2014). Mertens (as cited in Mutsagondo, 2021) argues that post-positivists hold that whilst reality exists, it is not easy to discover it as it can be discovered with probability and not with certainty. Positivism and post-positivism are epistemological perspectives in quantitative research, hence were not used in this mixed methods research (MMR).

#### **4.2.2 Interpretivism**

Interpretivism also referred to as constructivism or social constructivism is the paradigm that shows that a person's knowledge about the world is the creation of his or her mind as his or her perception of the world is personal in line with his or her pre-conceptions, beliefs and values (Creswell, 2014). According to Gray (as cited in Abdullah, 2022), social reality is different from the natural world in that the social world deals with actions of people while the natural world deals with laws of nature that require consistencies in the data that is collected, hence the need for different methods to study them. Interpretivists therefore believe that there are multiple realities and multiple truths which are likely to change just as the social world changes from time to time (Neuman, 2014). Neuman (2014) further indicate that Interpretivism is normally associated with qualitative research, it was therefore not used in this MMR.

#### **4.2.3 Transformative paradigm**

Transformative paradigm arose during the 1980s and 1990s from individuals who felt that the postpositivist assumptions imposed structural laws and theories that did not fit marginalised individuals in society or issues of power and social justice, discrimination, and oppression that needed to be addressed (Creswell, 2014). Transformative paradigm holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression at whatever levels it occurs (Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, the research contains an action agenda for reform that may change lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or

live, and the researcher's life. Transformative paradigm is qualitative in nature; therefore, it was not used in this MMR.

#### **4.2.4 Pragmatism paradigm**

Pragmatism paradigm arises out of actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It states that sources of knowledge should not be restricted to positivism or interpretivism alone, but should be practically-oriented in solving problems (Mutsagondo, 2021). Pragmatism is more of a practical solution to a problem than a philosophy and it emphasises actions, situations and consequences (Cohen et al., 2018). The current study used pragmatism paradigm. The choice is guided by the fact that pragmatism is seen as a paradigm that provides the underlying philosophical framework for using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This paradigm therefore allowed this researcher to consult various data collection techniques, various data interpretation methods, and various data analysis methods to fully understand records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council. Similar studies by Mutsagondo (2021) and Maseh (2015) on records management practices in public institutions also adopted pragmatism paradigm.

### **4.3 Research methods**

Research methods are tools and techniques for doing research (Cohen et al., 2018). Decisions about the choice of the research approach are influenced by the research problem and the issue being studied (Creswell, 2014). Three types of research methods are quantitative, qualitative, and MMR (Creswell, 2014). These are explained in the subsequent paragraphs.

#### **4.3.1 Quantitative research method**

Quantitative research method is concerned with quantifying things. It asks questions such as 'how long', 'how many' or 'the degree to which' (Creswell, 2014). In other words, quantitative research method focuses on measurement of magnitude or aggregate including numbers, percentages, numerical counts, statistical tests and mathematical models (Rajasekar et al., 2013). Rajasekar et al. (2013) further maintain that quantitative research is descriptive, numerical and

often presents data in tables and graphs. This method helps researchers to generalise research data to large amounts of populations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). This quantitative method was not adopted in this MMR.

#### **4.3.2 Qualitative research method**

Qualitative research method refers to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). It collects non-standardised data, analyses subjective meaning and incorporates multiple realities (Neuman, 2014). Participants in qualitative research broaden and deepen the researcher's understanding of the social world, particularly showing why people behave in certain manners and how they are affected by events around them (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research maintains the stance that knowledge is socially constructed by people. Likewise, Johnson and Christensen (2014) postulate that qualitative researchers often hold the belief that human behaviour is fluid, and constantly changing over time and place, with little interest in applying the findings beyond the specific people who are studied. Qualitative research method was also not adopted in this MMR.

#### **4.3.3 Mixed methods research**

MMR is an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks (Cohen et al., 2018). MMR approach was used in this study because one method has limitations and biases, making it important to augment quantitative data with qualitative data, and vice versa, to close gaps and provide better and more comprehensive answers to the research problem at hand (Creswell, 2014). Mutsagondo (2021) opines that use of the MMR should not be seen as a sign of detesting quantitative or qualitative research approaches, but a practical and complementary way of helping interrogate a research problem from a more informed position. The disadvantage of MMR is that it is expensive to implement and time consuming (Hibberts & Johnson, 2012). Despite its downside, the current study used MMR to investigate records management practices at M'belwa District Council because the research questions guiding this study necessitated the use of MMR in which both quantitative and qualitative data is collected. However, qualitative data was dominant in this

study. MMR was also employed by similar studies on records management practices in local authorities by Malatji and Marutha (2023) and Gupta and Bukhari (2022).

#### **4.4 Research designs**

Research designs are types of inquiry within quantitative, qualitative, and MMR approaches that provide specific direction for procedures in research (Cohen et al., 2018). Quantitative research designs provide a numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population, examples being survey and experimental designs (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative designs were not adopted because the study used MMR designs. Qualitative research designs focus on the contexts and meaning of human lives and experiences for the purpose of inductive or theory-development driven research, and examples include narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Cohen et al., 2018). These qualitative designs were not employed as this study used MMR designs.

MMR designs are ones in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study (Creswell, 2014). MMR uses designs such as explanatory sequential where quantitative data are usually collected first, followed by qualitative data to explain the quantitative data; exploratory sequential where qualitative data are usually collected first typically with a small sample, with quantitative data from a larger sample used to generalise the findings; embedded where each research question requires both quantitative and qualitative data, and qualitative data may be added to quantitative data; and convergent parallel where both quantitative and qualitative data are collected independently and in parallel with each other, and then they converge, yielding triangulation of data and offering complementary data on the topic in question (Cohen et al., 2018). Convergent parallel design was used in this study by converging quantitative and qualitative data collected from M'mbelwa District Council staffs to provide comprehensive results, and integrate the information in the interpretation of the final results.

#### **4.5 Target population**

Target population is “the total quantity of things, organisations or people that a study focuses on” (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 1). The study targeted M'mbelwa District Council which has 10,943

employees (GOM, 2017). Public Sector Reforms Management Unit (2022) indicates that administratively, each district council is headed by a District Commissioner, with the help of Director of Planning and Development, Director of Administration, Director of Finance, Director of Education Youth and Sports, Director of Health and Social Services, Director of Public Works, Chief Accountant, Chief Labour Officer, Chief Primary Education Advisor, Chief Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Officer, Principal Administrator, Principal Environmental Health Officer, and Principal Social Welfare Officer. It was further indicated that the middle level management of a district council has Management Information Systems Officer, Economist, Internal Auditor, Accountant, Agriculture Extension Development Coordinator, Forestry Officer, Human Resource Development Officer, Human Resource Planning Officer, Community Development Officer, District Social Welfare Officer, Gender Officer, Systems Analyst, Registration Officer, Estates Management Officer, Youth Officer, and Information Officer (PSRMU, 2022). The lower-level management is made of those holding clerical positions in various departments of the district council (PSRMU, 2022). The target population is indicated in the Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1: Target population of the study (N = 117)**

District Council	Employee Management Level			
	Top	Middle	Clerical	TOTAL
M'mbelwa	17	69	31	117

Source: Field Data 2022

#### 4.6 Sampling techniques

Sampling is whereby a small set of cases is selected from a large population from where a researcher generalises about the population (Neuman, 2014). Creswell (2014) describes two main sampling techniques as follows: Random sampling which relies on unplanned selection, or the process by which each element has equal chance of selection, examples being, simple, systematic, stratified, and cluster. Non-random sampling is a planned selection where participants are known prior to selection. Examples of non-random sampling include quota, purposive, and snowball. Random and non-random sampling techniques can be used in either quantitative or qualitative studies (Neuman, 2014). It is common for MMR to use more than one kind of sampling (random, non-random) and to use samples of different sizes, scope and types

(Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009 as cited in Cohen et. al., 2018). Parallel, sequential, and multilevel are sampling techniques used in mixed methods research (Cohen et. al., 2018). This study used parallel mixed methods sampling in which two samples, both random and non-random, are selected, running side by side simultaneously, but separate from each other, that is, data from one sample do not influence the collection of data from the other and vice versa (Cohen et. al., 2018). Purposive sampling was used to select the Registry Officer and Management Information Systems Officer (MISO). In a purposive sampling technique, participants deemed as “information-rich” are deliberately chosen due to their knowledge, skills and experiences in a phenomenon under study (Etikan et al., 2016). Registry Officer and MISO were selected into the study because they are responsible for keeping records and controlling ICTs respectively. Top, middle and clerical staff were selected using a random sampling technique called stratified purposive sampling. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (as cited in Cohen et. al., 2018), in stratified purposive sampling, the researcher identifies the different strata within the population under study, and then selects a limited number of cases from within each of those strata, ensuring that the selection of these cases is based on purposive sampling strategies. The respondents were therefore divided into three strata of 17 top, 69 middle, and 31 clerical level staff. Respondents were thereafter purposively drawn from each stratum based on sample size determined in section 4.7 which is 11 top, 20 middle, and 18 clerical level staff. In this case, the purposive sample was a subset of the random sample (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, as cited in Cohen et. al., 2018). In other similar studies, Mutsagondo (2021) and Chaterera (2016) also used parallel mixed methods sampling.

#### **4.7 Sample size**

This is the number of participants from whom a researcher obtains the required information in a study (Cohen et. al., 2018). A sample size can be determined using a census, imitating a sample size of similar studies, using published tables, and applying formulas (Israel, 2013). Using a published table as espoused by Israel (2013), when the target population is greater than 100 and has not exceeded 125, a sample size of 51 can be drawn with a precision level of  $\pm 10\%$ . Targeted population at M’mbelwa District Council was 117, hence 51 employees were sampled from the Council. Therefore, qualitative data was collected from two officers (Registry Officer and

MISO) from the Council roughly at the same time when quantitative data were being collected from 49 officers (top, middle, and clerical level staff) of the same Council. The study therefore had a sample size of 51 as shown Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Sample size of the study (n = 51)**

District Council	Employee Management Levels (strata)					TOTAL
	Top	Middle		Clerical		
	Questionnaire	Questionnaire	Interview	Questionnaire	Interview	
M'mbelwa	11	20	1	18	1	51

#### 4.8 Data collection instruments

Data collection instruments are devices used to obtain data from respondents (Chikomba, 2018). Creswell (2014) states that qualitative research utilises focus groups discussions (FGDs) guides, interview guides, document review guides, and observations guides, and quantitative research uses questionnaires. The researcher employed questionnaires, interview guides, observation tool and document review guide. A questionnaire is a list of mimeographed or printed questions that is completed for a respondent to give his or her opinion (Cohen et al., 2018). Three set of questionnaires with open-ended and close-ended questions solicited data from the sampled 49 M'mbelwa District Council staff identified from each of the three strata.

Top management level stratum questionnaire was categorised from sections A to E. Section A sought to collect demographic data, section B collected data on existing records management practices, section C collected data on the records management policy framework, section D gathered data on benefits of effective records management on service delivery, and section E collected data on factors contributing to effective records management. Middle management level stratum questionnaire was categorised from sections A to D. Section A sought to collect demographic data, section B collected data on existing records management practices, section C collected data on the benefits of effective records management on service delivery, and section D collected data on factors contributing to effective records management. Clerical level stratum questionnaire was categorised from sections A to C. Section A sought to collect demographic data, section B collected data on existing records management practices, and section C collected data on factors contributing to effective records management. Studies by Makgahlela (2021) and Chaterera (2016) also used questionnaires to collect data on similar topic.

The study also used an interview to collect data from two district council officers as indicated above. An interview is “an oral interchange of information, views, beliefs and opinions between the interviewer and the interviewee” (Creswell, 2014, p. 190). An interview guide, is a list of items, questions, prompts and probes (Cohen et al., 2018). Two separate semi-structured interview guides were used to collect data from Registry Officer (respondent 1) and MISO (respondent 2) respectively from the Council. Interview guides for Registry Officer and MISO were categorised from sections A to D. Sections A sought to collect demographic data, sections B collected data on existing records management practices, sections C collected data on the records management policy framework, sections D collected data on factors contributing to effective records management. Similar studies by Mutsagondo (2021) and Makgahlela (2020) also used interview guides.

Personal observation is whereby a researcher watches and listens as the observed people undergo their normal duties (Creswell, 2014). The study also used an observation guide in observing participants to identify records management practices they perform. Similar studies by Mutsagondo (2021) and Maseh (2015) also used observation guides to collect data. Document review is a form of qualitative analysis where a researcher uses documents to give voice and meaning around a topic (Creswell, 2014). Document review guide was used to review records management related documents like Acts and policies at the Council. Similar studies by Mutsagondo (2021) and Makgahlela (2020) also used document review guides. Each of the four data gathering instruments described above, complemented each other, and qualitative data collection tools were dominant. Questionnaires, interview guides, observation guide, and document analysis guide contents were adopted from the following related studies’ instruments: Chaterera (2016); Makgahlela (2021); Maseh (2015); and Mutsagondo (2021). Table 4.3 maps research questions to respondents, data collection tools, and data analysis strategy.



**Table 4.3: Mapping research questions to respondents, data collection tools, and data analysis strategy**

Research question	Respondents	Data collection tools	Data analysis strategy
What are the existing records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council?	Registry Officer	Appendix 8: Interview guide	Thematic Analysis
	MISO	Appendix 9: Interview guide	Thematic Analysis
	Top Management Staff	Appendix 5: Questionnaire	SPSS
	Middle Management Staff	Appendix 6: Questionnaire	SPSS
	Clerical Level Staff	Appendix 7: Questionnaire	SPSS
		Appendix 10: Observation guide	Thematic Analysis
What policy framework is governing records management at M'mbelwa District Council?	Registry Officer	Appendix 8: Interview guide	Thematic Analysis
	MISO	Appendix 9: Interview guide	Thematic Analysis
	Top Management Staff	Appendix 5: Questionnaire	SPSS
		Appendix 11: Document review guide	Thematic Analysis
What are the benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery at M'mbelwa District Council?	Top Management Staff	Appendix 5: Questionnaire	SPSS
	Middle Management Staff	Appendix 6: Questionnaire	SPSS
	Registry Officer	Appendix 8: Interview guide	Thematic Analysis
	MISO	Appendix 9: Interview guide	Thematic Analysis
What are the factors contributing to effective records management at M'mbelwa District Council?	Registry Officer	Appendix 8: Interview guide	Thematic Analysis
	MISO	Appendix 9: Interview guide	Thematic Analysis
	Top Management Staff	Appendix 5: Questionnaire	SPSS
	Middle Management Staff	Appendix 6: Questionnaire	SPSS
	Clerical Level Staff	Appendix 7: Questionnaire	SPSS

#### **4.9 Pre-testing of research instruments**

Pretesting is a method of checking that questions work as intended and are understood by those who are likely to respond to them (Cohen et. al., 2018). Interview guides and questionnaires were pre-tested amongst five employees at Nkhatabay District Council. One top management staff, one middle management staff, and one clerical staff responded to the questionnaires. Registry Officer and MISO responded to the interview guides. Effectiveness of observation tool and document review guide were also tested by the researcher at Nkhatabay District Council set up. Pretesting results indicated that all the research instruments were correctly designed and proved fit for this study.

#### **4.10 Validity and reliability of the instruments**

Reliability has to do with dependability and consistency of a study and can be achieved by means of triangulation (Neuman, 2014). Triangulation is “a measure to confirm findings by observing phenomenon from different viewpoints” (Zauszniewski, 2012, p. 40). Data triangulation is whereby a study collects and analyses data using multiple means (Cohen et. al., 2018). In this study, data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and personal observation hence, achieving data triangulation. Validity measurements includes face validity, content validity, and criterion validity. The findings therefore have to tally with what people generally see and believe, or else, those findings can be dismissed as not being valid (Neuman, 2014). Face validity was ensured in this study because records management practices are portrayed as important and indispensable in the public sector.

#### **4.11 Data collection procedures**

The researcher personally collected data for this study. The researcher called interview participants and scheduled appointments on dates and time of their convenience. Thereafter, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with Records Officer and MISO, each interview took about 15 minutes. Handwritten notes were made by researcher while interviewing the participants and interviews were audio recorded after a permission to audio record the interviews was sought from interviewees. The researcher also administered questionnaires to the 49

respondents at the Council and collected them after one week once they were filled. Using observation guide and document review guide, the researcher made obtrusive observations and reviewed some records management related documents such as Acts and Policies used by M'belwa District Council.

#### **4.12 Data analysis techniques**

The process of analysing data involves interpreting and summarising data so that the most important features of the data are communicated (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative data for this study were analysed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20 software to generate frequencies, percentages, tables, graphs and inferential statistics. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The researcher read recorded responses, and manually coded and categorised them into keywords and themes that emerged from the data. Both quantitative and qualitative data from the questionnaires, document analysis, interviews, and obtrusive observations were integrated in order to obtain a more holistic picture in an effort to provide answers posed by research questions.

#### **4.13 Ethical considerations**

Ethical clearance was sought from Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC). A letter was written to seek permission to collect research data from M'belwa District Council. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by not allowing respondents to reveal their names and assuring them that data collected would only be used for academic purposes. Respondents were also assured that they were free to withdraw from the study without any reprisals.

#### **4.14 Dissemination of research results**

The results were disseminated at Viva Voce of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Postgraduate Committee. The thesis copies were also distributed to the Information Sciences Department, Mzuzu University Library, and the M'belwa District Council. Finally, the study was published in one of the reputable peer reviewed journals in the records management field.

#### **4.15 Chapter summary**

This chapter had laid out the blueprint for paradigm choice, research method, research design, sampling techniques, data instruments, validity and reliability, data collection procedure, data analysis, and ethical issues. The next chapter (Chapter Five) provides a detailed presentation and analysis of the study findings.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and analyses the results of the study. Since the study employed convergent parallel research design, qualitative data were collected almost at the same time as when quantitative data were being collected. The data was collected using structured questionnaires, face to face interviews, observations, and document reviews. The data collected through questionnaires was analysed using IBM SPSS Version 20 to generate frequencies, percentages, inferential statistics, tables and charts. Data collected through interviews, observations, and document reviews were thematically analysed and presented in a descriptive form. Data analysis and presentation of findings are important because they enable researcher to make sense of the information supplied by the research participants in the study (Creswell, 2014). Presentation of the findings is guided by the research objectives (see below) and the theoretical framework of the study, the Records Continuum Model (RCM). The study addressed the following research objectives:

- To establish the existing records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council.
- To examine the existence of policy framework governing records management at M'mbelwa District Council
- To establish the benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery at M'mbelwa District Council.
- To investigate factors that contribute to effective records management at M'mbelwa District Council.

Qualitative results are presented immediately after the corresponding quantitative findings. The section below presents the response rate.

#### **5.2 Response rate**

Response rate refers to the number of successful responses to the request to participate in a study (Makgahlela, 2021 p. 132). A total of forty-nine (49) questionnaires were distributed among top management, middle management, and clerical level staff at M'mbelwa District Council. The

researcher also scheduled interviews with the Registry Officer and MISO who were considered key informants. Table 5.1 shows the response rate for questionnaires' respondents.

**Table 5.1: Response rate for questionnaires (n = 42)**

Population	Sample Size	Response Rate (%)	Data Collection Method
Top Management Staff	11	9 (82%)	Administering questionnaire
Middle Management Staff	20	17 (85%)	Administering questionnaire
Clerical Level Staff	18	16 (89 %)	Administering questionnaire
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>42 (85.7%)</b>	

Results presented in Table 5.1 indicate that from a total of 49 questionnaires distributed, 42 were successfully completed and returned representing response rate of 85.7%. Only seven (7) questionnaires were unsuccessfully returned following busy work schedules of the staff who did not find time to respond to the questionnaires. The response rate of an interview with Registry Officer and MISO was 100%. Overall, out of the 51 targeted population, 44 took part in the study representing a response rate of 86.3%. Bryman (2012) contends that a 50% response rate is acceptable and sufficient for analysis, response rate of 60% is deemed good, but anything greater than 70% is regarded as very good. This entails that response rate for this study was very good and ready for analysis. The section below presents the demographic details of respondents.

### **5.3 Demographic profile of respondents**

Section A (Questions I to III: Appendices 5 to 9) of the questionnaires and interview guides elicited respondents' demographic profiles. The characteristics determined were gender, work experience, and highest education qualification. Table 5.2 shows gender of respondents.

Results in Table 5.2 show that majority of respondents 27 (61%) were males, and 17 (39%) were females. Out of nine top management staff, seven (78%) were males and two (22%) were females. Further, out of 18 middle management staff, 10 (56%) were males and eight (44%) were females. Finally, out of 17 clerical staff, 10 (59%) were males, seven (41%) were females.

**Table 5.2: Respondents by gender (n = 44)**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Top Management Staff</b>	Male	7	78
	Female	2	22
<b>Middle Management Staff</b>	Male	10	56
	Female	8	44
<b>Clerical Level Staff</b>	Male	10	59
	Female	7	41
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	27	61
	<b>Female</b>	17	39

The respondents were also asked to indicate their work experience. Table 5.3 shows the results.

**Table 5.3: Respondents' work experience (n = 44)**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Top Management Staff</b>	Below 5 years	0	0
	5-10 years	1	11.1
	11-20 years	4	44.4
	21-30 years	1	11.1
	31-40 years	2	22.2
	Above 40 years	1	11.1
<b>Middle Management Staff</b>	Below 5 years	5	28
	5-10 years	5	28
	11-20 years	6	33
	21-30 years	1	5.5
	31-40 years	1	5.5
	Above 40 years	0	0
<b>Clerical Level Staff</b>	Below 5 years	5	29.4
	5-10 years	4	23.5
	11-20 years	4	23.5
	21-30 years	2	11.8
	31-40 years	2	11.8
	Above 40 years	0	0

Results in Table 5.3 show that many of the top management staff indicated that they had worked for a period of 11-20 years, four (44.4%), 31-40 years, two (22.2%), 5-10 years, one (11.1%),

21-30 years, one (11.1%), and above 40 years, one (11.1%). Further, many of the middle management staff indicated that they had worked for a period of 11-20 years, six (33%), below 5 years, five (28%), 5-10 years, five (28%), 21-30 years, one (5.5%), 31-40 years, one (5.5%), and above 40 years, 0 (0%). Finally, many clerical level staff indicated that they had worked for a period of below 5 years, five (29.4%), 5-10 years, four (23.5%), 11-20 years, four (23.5%), 21-30 years, two (11.8%), 31-40 years, two (11.8%), and above 40 years, 0 (0%).

The respondents were further asked to indicate their highest education qualifications. Table 5.4 shows the results.

**Table 5.4: Respondents' highest education qualifications (n = 44)**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Top Management Staff</b>	Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE)	0	0
	Other Certificate	0	0
	Diploma	0	0
	Bachelor's Degree	8	88.9
	Master's Degree	1	11.1
	Doctoral Degree	0	0
<b>Middle Management Staff</b>	MSCE	1	6
	Other Certificate	0	0
	Diploma	4	22
	Bachelor's Degree	13	72
	Master's Degree	0	0
	Doctoral Degree	0	0
<b>Clerical Level Staff</b>	MSCE	3	17.6
	Other Certificate	3	17.6
	Diploma	8	47.1
	Bachelor's Degree	3	17.6
	Master's Degree	0	0
	Doctoral Degree	0	0

Results in Table 5.4 show that majority of top management staff indicated that they had bachelor's degree, eight (88.9%), and master's degree, one (11.1%). There were 0 (0%) with a doctorate degree, 0 (0%) with a diploma, 0 (0%) with other certificates, and 0 (0%) with MSCE



only. Further, majority of middle management staff indicated that they had bachelor's degree, 13 (72%), diploma, four (22%), and MSCE only, one (6%). There were 0 (0%) with a doctorate degree, 0 (0%) with a master's degree, and 0 (0%) with other certificates. Finally, many clerical staff indicated that they had a diploma, eight (47.1%), bachelor's degree, three (17.6%), other certificates, three (17.6%), and MSCE only, three (17.6%). There were 0 (0%) with a doctorate degree, and 0 (0%) with a master's degree.

## **5.4 Existing records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council**

Objective one of this study intended to examine the existing records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council in terms of records created or received, records storage and maintenance, records access and security, and records retention and disposal. This objective was addressed through the first research question: *What are the existing records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council?*

### **5.4.1 Records created or received**

Section B (Question number I) of the questionnaires sought to solicit multiple responses from the respondents on various records created or received by M'mbelwa District Council Staff. Table 5.5 shows the results.

Results presented in Table 5.5 show that respondents create or receive reports, 27 (64.3%), emails, 20 (47.6%), minutes, 19 (45.2%), leave applications, 18 (42.9%), receipts, 18, (42.9%), government circulars, 17 (40.5%), policy manuals, 15 (35.7%), requisitions, 15 (35.7%), assets registers, 14 (33.3%), government regulations, 14 (33.3%), instructions, 13 (30.9%), operations records, 13 (30.9%), staff appraisals, 13 (30.9%), memoranda, 12 (28.6%), appointment letters, 12 (28.6%), attendance reports, 12 (28.6%), correspondences, 11 (26.2%), bank checks, 11 (26.2%), contract documents, 11 (26.2%), payrolls, nine (21.2%), invoices, seven (16.7%), inventory controls, six (14.3%), purchase and sales orders, four (9.5%), tax returns, three (7.1%), and fax, three (7.1%).

**Table 5.5: Records created or received (n = 42)**

Type of records	Overall		Top Management Staff		Middle Management Staff		Clerical Level Staff	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Reports	27	64.3	7	77.8	11	64.7	9	56.3
Emails	20	47.6	7	77.8	8	47.1	5	31.3
Minutes	19	45.2	8	88.9	7	41.2	4	25
Leave applications	18	42.9	7	77.8	4	23.5	7	43.8
Receipts	18	42.9	6	66.7	7	41.2	5	31.3
Government circulars	17	40.5	6	66.7	6	35.3	5	31.3
Policy manuals	15	35.7	6	66.7	4	23.5	5	31.3
Requisitions	15	35.7	5	55.6	6	35.3	4	25
Assets registers	14	33.3	6	66.7	4	23.5	4	25
Government regulations	14	33.3	4	44.4	5	29.4	5	31.3
Instructions	13	30.9	5	55.6	3	17.6	5	31.3
Financial records	13	30.9	4	44.4	7	41.2	2	12.5
Operational records	13	30.9	3	33.3	4	23.5	6	37.5
Staff appraisal	13	30.9	7	77.8	2	11.8	4	25
Memoranda	12	28.6	4	44.4	3	17.6	5	31.3
Appointment letters	12	28.6	6	66.7	4	23.5	2	12.5
Attendance reports	12	28.6	5	55.6	4	23.5	3	18.8
Correspondences	11	26.2	5	55.6	2	11.8	4	25
Bank checks	11	26.2	4	44.4	4	23.5	3	18.8
Contract documents	11	26.2	4	44.4	4	23.5	3	18.8
Payrolls	9	21.4	3	33.3	3	17.6	3	18.8
Invoices	7	16.7	4	44.4	0	0	3	18.8
Inventory controls	6	14.3	3	33.3	1	5.9	2	12.5
Purchase and sales orders	4	9.5	3	33.3	0	0	1	6.2
Tax returns	3	7.1	2	22.2	0	0	1	6.2
Fax	3	7.1	1	11.1	0	0	2	12.5

In terms of individual categories, minutes of meetings were some of the records created or received as indicated by eight (88.9%) top management staff. These were followed by emails, seven (77.8%), reports, seven (77.8%), staff appraisals, seven (77.8%), and leave applications,

seven (77.8%). Further top management indicated that the council created records or received them in form of receipts, six (66.7%), appointment letters, six (66.7%), assets registers, six (66.7%), government circulars, six (66.7%), policy manuals, six (66.7%), attendance reports, five (55.6%), requisitions, five (55.6%), correspondences, five (55.6%), instructions, five (55.6%), invoices, four (44.4%), memoranda, four (44.4%), bank checks, four (44.4%), contract documents, four (44.4%), government regulations, four (44.4%), payrolls, three (33.3%), inventory controls, three (33.3%), purchase and sales orders, three (33.3%), operational records, three (33.3%), tax returns, two (22.2%), and fax, one (1.1%).

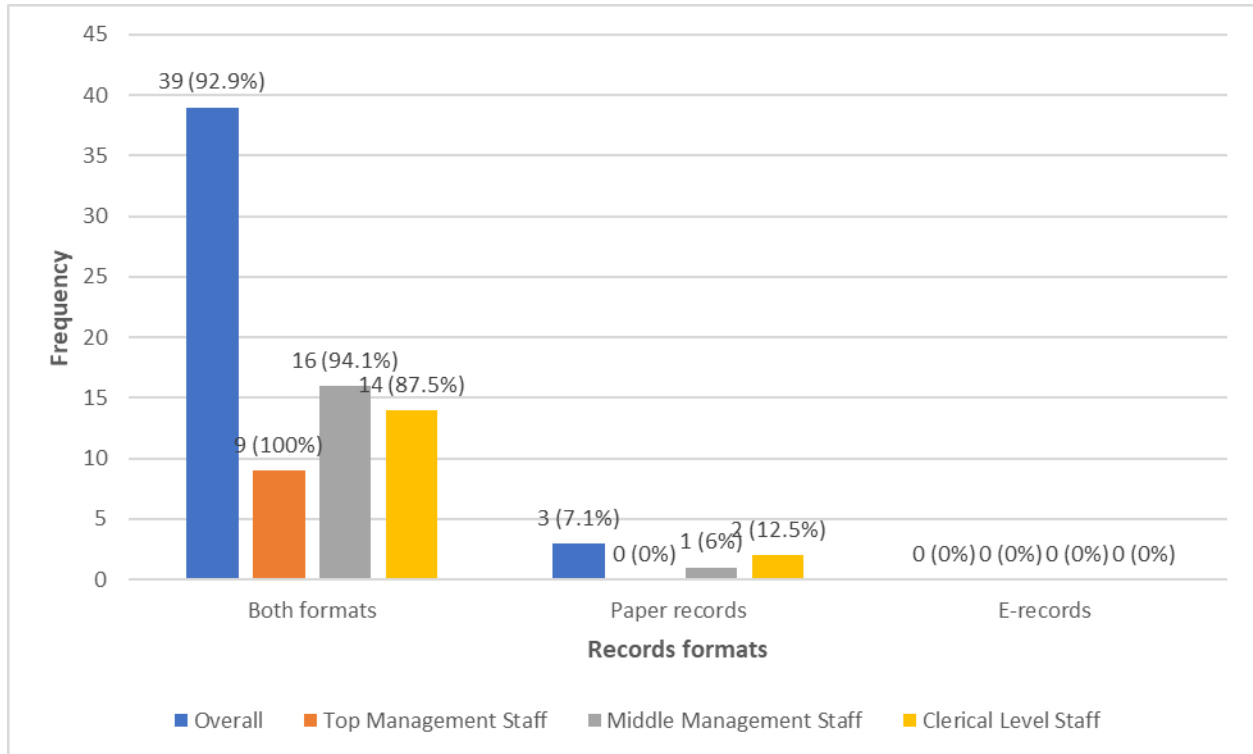
However, eleven (64.7%) middle management staff indicated that they created or received records through reports, followed by emails, eight (47.1%), minutes, seven (41.2%), receipts, seven (41.2%), financial reports, seven (41.2%), government circulars, six (35.3%), requisitions, six (35.3%), government regulations, five (29.4%), leave applications, four (23.5%), appointment letters, four (23.5%), assets registers, four (23.5%), policy manuals, four (23.5%), attendance reports, four (23.5%), bank checks, four (23.5%), contract documents, four (23.5%), and operational records, four (23.5%). Middle management staff further indicated that they created or received records in form of instructions, three (17.6%), memoranda, three (17.6%), payrolls, three (17.6%), staff appraisal, two (11.8%), correspondences, two (11.8%), inventory controls, one (5.9%), invoices, 0 (0%), purchase and sales orders, 0 (0%), tax returns, 0 (0%), and fax, 0 (0%).

Further, nine (56.3%) clerical level staff indicated that they created or received records through reports; followed by leave applications, seven (43.8%), operation records, six (37.5%), government regulations, five (31.3%), emails, five (31.3%), policy manuals, five (31.3%), memoranda, five (31.3%), government circulars, five (31.3%), instructions, five (31.3%), and receipts, five (31.3%). Clerical level staff further indicated that they created or received records in form of requisitions, four (25%), assets registers, four (25%), correspondences, four (25%), minutes, four (25%), staff appraisals, four (25%), payrolls, three (18.8%), bank checks, three (18.8%), contract documents, three (18.8%), attendance reports, three (18.8%), invoices, three (18.8%), inventory controls, two (12.5%), financial records, two (12.5%), appointment letters, two (12.5%), fax, two (12.5%), purchase and sales orders, one (6.3%), and tax returns, one (6.3%). Results show that the most common types of records created or received at M'mbelwa

District Council are minutes, emails, reports, staff appraisal, leave applications, receipts, appointment letters, assets registers, government circulars, and policy manuals among others.

### 5.4.2 Formats of records created or received

Section B (Question number II) of the questionnaires sought to find out the formats of records created or received in various offices at M’mbelwa District Council. Results are presented in Figure 5.1.



**Figure 5.1: Formats of records created or received (n = 42)**

Results presented in Figure 5.1 show that respondents create or receive records in both formats, 39 (92.9%), paper records, three (7.1%), and e-records, 0 (0%). In terms of individual categories, study results show that all top management staff created or received records in both print and electronic formats, nine (100%). There were 0 (0%) who indicated the creation or receipt of paper records only, and 0 (0%) electronic records only. Sixteen (94%) of middle management staff also created or received records in both formats, one, (6%) paper records only, and 0 (0%), electronic records only. Fourteen (87.5%) clerical staff created or received records in both formats, two (12.5%), paper records only, and 0 (0%), electronic records only. These results show that both paper and electronic records formats were being generated.

### 5.4.3 Capturing of records created or received

The respondents were asked to indicate tools they used in capturing records created or received in their respective offices. This was captured in Section B (Question number III) of the questionnaires. Table 5.6 presents the findings.

**Table 5.6: Records capturing tools (n = 42)**

Records capturing tools	Overall		Top Management Staff		Middle Management Staff		Clerical Level Staff	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Office computers	27	64.3	6	66.7	12	70.6	9	56.3
Electronic Records Management System (ERMS)	18	42.9	4	44.4	6	35.3	8	50
Personal computers	17	40.5	6	66.7	8	47.1	3	18.8
Notebooks without carbon copy	11	26.2	0	0	3	17.6	8	50
Official receipt books	10	23.8	4	44.4	2	11.8	4	25
Notebooks with carbon copy	9	21.4	4	44.4	2	11.8	3	18.8
Personal cellphones	6	14.3	0	0	4	23.5	2	12.5

Results presented in Table 5.6 show that respondents capture records using office computers, 27 (64.3%), ERMS, 18 (42.9%), personal computers, 17 (40.5%), notebooks without carbon copy, 11 (26.2%), official receipt books, 10 (23.8%), notebooks with carbon copy, nine (21.4%), and personal cellphones, six (14.3%).

On individual categories, top management staff indicated that capturing of records was being done using office computers, six (66.7%), personal computers, six (66.7%), ERMS, four (44.4%), notebooks with carbon copies, four (44.4%), official receipt books, four (44.4%), notebooks without carbon copy, 0 (0%), and personal cellphones, 0 (0%). Responses from middle management staff show that capturing of records was done through office computers, 12 (70.6%), personal computers, eight (47.1%), ERMS, six (35.3%), personal cellphones, four (23.5%), notebooks without carbon copy, three (17.6%), notebooks with carbon copy, two (11.8%), and official receipt books, two (11.8%). Responses of clerical staff show that capturing of records was done through office computers, nine (56.3%), ERMS, eight (50%), notebooks without carbon copy, eight (50%), official receipt books, four (25%), notebooks with carbon

copy, three (18.8%), personal computers, three (18.8%), personal cellphones, two (12.5%). Findings indicate that basic technologies and manual ways for capturing data such as office computers, personal computers, and notebooks with carbon copy were the most used tools.

#### 5.4.4 Records storage and maintenance

##### 5.4.4.1 Paper records storage facilities

Section B (Question number IV) of the questionnaires solicited data on the storage facilities they used for storing paper records. Table 5.7 presents quantitative results.

**Table 5.7: Paper records storage facilities used (n = 42)**

Storage Facility	Overall		Top Management Staff		Middle Management Staff		Clerical Level Staff	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Office files	30	71.4	7	77.8	13	76.5	10	62.5
Office shelves	23	54.8	6	66.7	9	52.9	8	50
Office drawers	23	54.8	5	55.6	9	52.9	9	56.3
Office folders	19	45.2	6	66.7	7	41.2	6	37.5
Registry office facilities	15	35.7	6	66.7	3	17.6	6	37.5
Office metallic filing cabinets	14	33.3	3	33.3	3	17.6	8	50
Office tables	6	14.3	3	33.3	3	17.6	0	0
Office open cupboards	5	11.9	3	33.3	1	5.9	2	12.5
Office boxes	4	9.5	1	11.1	2	11.8	1	6.3
Office floor	2	4.8	1	11.1	0	0	1	6.3
Office corridors	2	4.8	1	11.1	0	0	1	6.3

Results presented in Table 5.7 show that respondents store paper records in office files, 30 (71.4%), office shelves, 23 (54.8%), office drawers, 23 (54.8%), office folders, 19 (45.2%), registry office facilities, 15 (35.7%), office metallic filing cabinets, 14 (33.3%), office tables, six (14.3%), office open cupboards, five (11.9%), office boxes, four (9.5%), office floor, two (4.8%), and office corridors, two (4.8%).

On individual categories, top management indicated that they used office files to store paper records, seven (77.8%), office shelves, six (66.7%), office folders, six (66.7%), registry office facilities, six (66.7%), office drawers, five (55.6%), office metallic filing cabinets, three (33.3%),

office open cap boards, three (33.3%), office tables, three (33.3%), office boxes, one (11.1%), office floor, one (11.1%), and office corridors, one (11.1%).

Responses on storage of paper records by middle management staff indicated that they used office files, thirteen (76.5%), office shelves, nine (52.9%), office drawers, nine (52.9%), office folders, seven (41.2%), registry office facilities, three (17.6%), office metallic filing cabinets, three (17.6%), office tables, three (17.6%), office boxes, two (11.8%), office open cupboards, one (5.9%), and office floors and office corridors, 0 (0%) each.

Clerical level staff indicated that they used office files, 10 (62.5%), office drawers, nine (56.3%), office shelves, eight (50%), office metallic cabinets, eight (50%), office folders, six (37.5%), registry office facilities, six (37.5%), office open cupboards, two (12.5%), office boxes, one (6.3%), office floor, one (6.3%), office corridors, one (6.3%), and office tables, 0 (0%). Results show that office files, shelves, folders, and drawers were the most used storage facilities for paper records.

#### 5.4.4.2 E-records storage facilities

Participants were also asked in Section B (Question number V) of the questionnaires to indicate storage facilities they used for storing e-records. Table 5.8 presents the results.

**Table 5. 8: E-records storage facilities used (n = 42)**

Storage Facility	Overall		Top Management Staff		Middle Management Staff		Clerical Level Staff	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
My office computers	28	66.7	5	55.6	12	70.6	11	68.8
Personal computers	20	47.6	7	77.8	9	52.9	4	25
Flash drives	18	42.9	5	55.6	9	52.9	4	25
ERMS	15	35.7	3	33.3	8	47.1	4	25
Registry office computers	9	21.4	4	44.4	2	11.8	3	18.8
IT office computers	9	21.4	3	33.3	4	23.3	2	12.5
Electronic records backup	5	11.9	0	0	1	5.9	5	31.2
In the cloud	3	7.1	2	22.2	1	5.9	0	0
No response	1	2.4	0	0	0	0	1	6.2

Results presented in Table 5.8 show that respondents store e-records in their office computers, 28 (66.7%), personal computers, 20 (47.6%), flash drives, 18 (42.9%), ERMS, 15 (35.7%), registry office computers, nine (21.4%), IT office computers, nine (21.4%), in the cloud, three (7.1%), electronic records backup, five (11.9%), and no response, one (2.4%).

On individual categories, top management staff indicated that they used personal computers to store e-records, seven (77.8%), office computers, five (55.6%), flash drives, five (55.6%), registry office computers, four (44.4%), ERMS, three (33.3%), IT office computers, three (33.3%), in the cloud, two (22.2%), electronic records backup, 0 (0%), and no response, 0 (0%). Responses on the storage of e-records from middle management staff indicate that they used office computers, twelve (70.6%), personal computers, nine (52.9%), flash drives, nine (52.9%), ERMS, eight (47.1%), IT office computers, four (23.3%), registry office computers, two (11.8%), in the cloud, one (5.9%), electronic records backup, one (5.9%), and no response, 0 (0%). Clerical level staff indicated that they used office computers, eleven (68.8%), electronic records backup, five (31.2%), personal computers, four (25%), flash drives, four (25%), ERMS, four (25%), registry office computers, three (18.8%), IT office computers, two (12.5%), no response, one (6.2%), and in the cloud, 0 (0%).

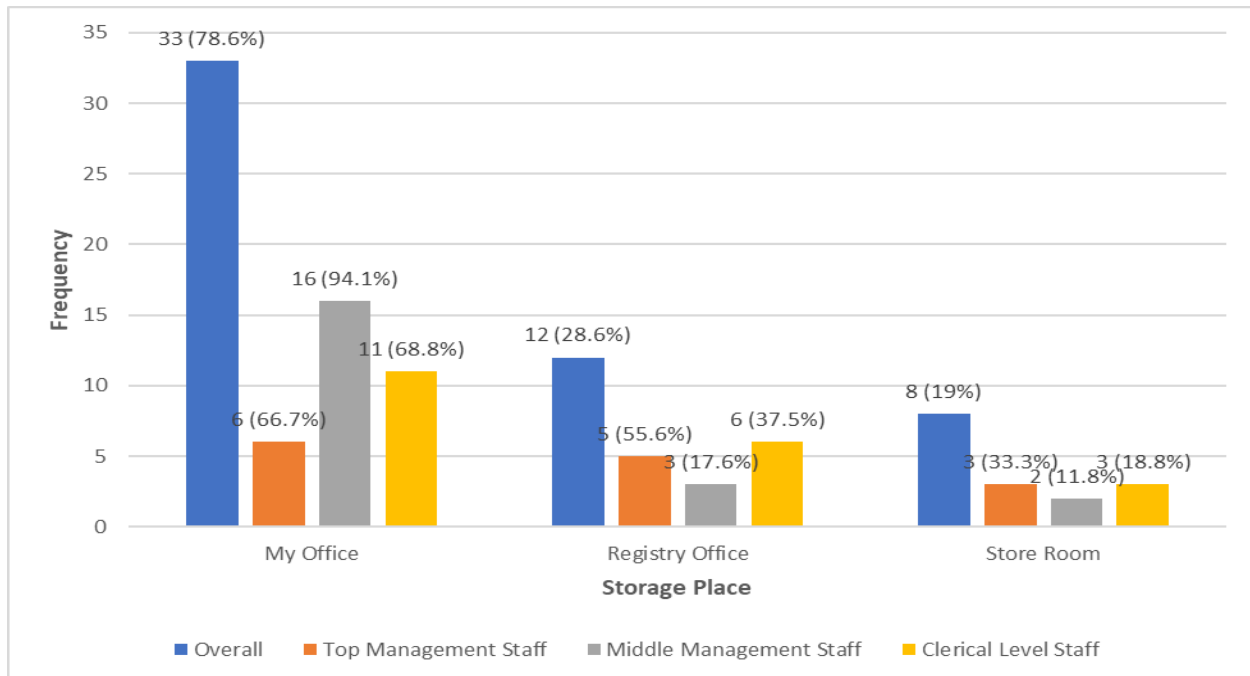
#### **5.4.4.3 Records storage place**

Section B (Question VI) of the questionnaires sought to find out the place of storage for records generated at the Council. Figure 5.2 shows the findings.

Results presented in Figure 5.2 show that respondents store records in their offices, 33 (78.6%), registry office, 12 (28.6%), and store rooms, eight (19%).

In terms of individual categories, top management staff indicated that they stored records in their offices, six (66.7%), registry office, five (55.6%), and storerooms, three (33.3%). For middle management staff, they indicated that they stored records in their offices, sixteen (94.1%), registry office, three (17.6%), and storerooms, two (11.8%). Lastly, clerical level staff stored records in their offices, eleven (68.8%), registry office, six (37.5%), and storerooms, three (18.8%). It is evident that most council staffs were storing records in their offices and others in the storerooms.





**Figure 5.2: Records storage place (n = 42)**

In order to validate the quantitative data, the researcher observed the storage places in Section B (Guide number II) of the observation tool and found that only one desktop computer for storing e-records was available in the registry office. The researcher also observed that despite some paper records in the registry being filed numerically, other paper records in offices and the registry were not properly organised. Further, the IT department had an ERMS called Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) which was being used for storing financial e-records. Figure 5.3 shows the IFMIS server.

The researcher also gathered qualitative data from Registry Officer and MISO through Section B (Question number I) of the interview guides on how the Council controlled temperature and relative humidity in records storage rooms. The verbatim responses are presented below:

*We do not have any temperature and relative humidity control measures in the registry (Respondent 1).*

*There are no temperature and relative humidity control measures in the finance department's IFMIS server room and in the paper records storage room (Respondent 2).*

The quantitative and qualitative results show that there is no dedicated place or system for storing all Council records and that records were being exposed to uncontrolled temperature and relative humidity.



**Figure 5.3: IFMIS server used for storing financial e-records**

#### **5.4.5 Records access and security**

Section B (Questions II-IV) of the interview guides solicited qualitative data from Registry Officer and MISO. Data was collected on access to M'mbelwa District Council's records, procedures one follows to gain access to records, and tools used for searching and tracking the Council records. Excerpts of the responses are presented below:

*Authorisation has to be sought from the District Commissioner for one to access records. File index is used to search for paper records, and records register book is used to track them (Respondent 1).*

The above response runs short of the RCM's evidentiality axis requirement which encourages the automation of accessing, searching and tracking of both paper and electronic records.

*Financial e-records from the IFMIS server are only accessed by MISO, and permission must be sought from the District Commissioner if others want to access them. To access e-records from the mother ministry server, one must get authorisation from the District Commissioner and the Principal Secretary for Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture. We use records serial numbers when searching for e-records, and on e-records*

*tracking, there are footprints on how records are being accessed by individuals from the server (Respondent 2).*

Results from respondent 2 do not fully meet the RCM's pluralisation dimension requirements which promote controlled access to e-records by encouraging the use of a recordkeeping system where authorised users can log in using usernames and passwords as opposed to monopolising access to the e-recordkeeping system.

Further, the study sought in Section B (Questions number V) of the interview guides, to establish from Registry Officer and MISO the security of records at the M'mbelwa District Council. The verbatim responses are presented below:

*Paper records are protected from unauthorised access by locking them up in cabinets. No one is allowed to alter records without permission. We do not have fire extinguishers, and fire alarms to guard against accidental loss of records (Respondent 1).*

*Locks are used to secure financial records in storage rooms. We also use passcodes known by MISO and responsible officers from the Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture to access financial e-records. To avoid accidental loss of financial e-records, we send daily backups to the server designated at the Ministry, and the Ministry sends backups to a server that is in Tanzania. The Council has a water hose pipe for extinguishing accidental fire but there are no fire alarms (Respondent 2).*

The above verbatim responses do not fully meet RCM's evidentiality dimension requirements of guarding against accidental loss of records.

#### **5.4.6 Records retention and disposal**

Section B (Questions VI-VIII) of interview guides sought to find out from the Registry Officer and MISO on the availability of records retention and disposition schedules, and whether there were records retention periods. The verbatim responses are presented below:

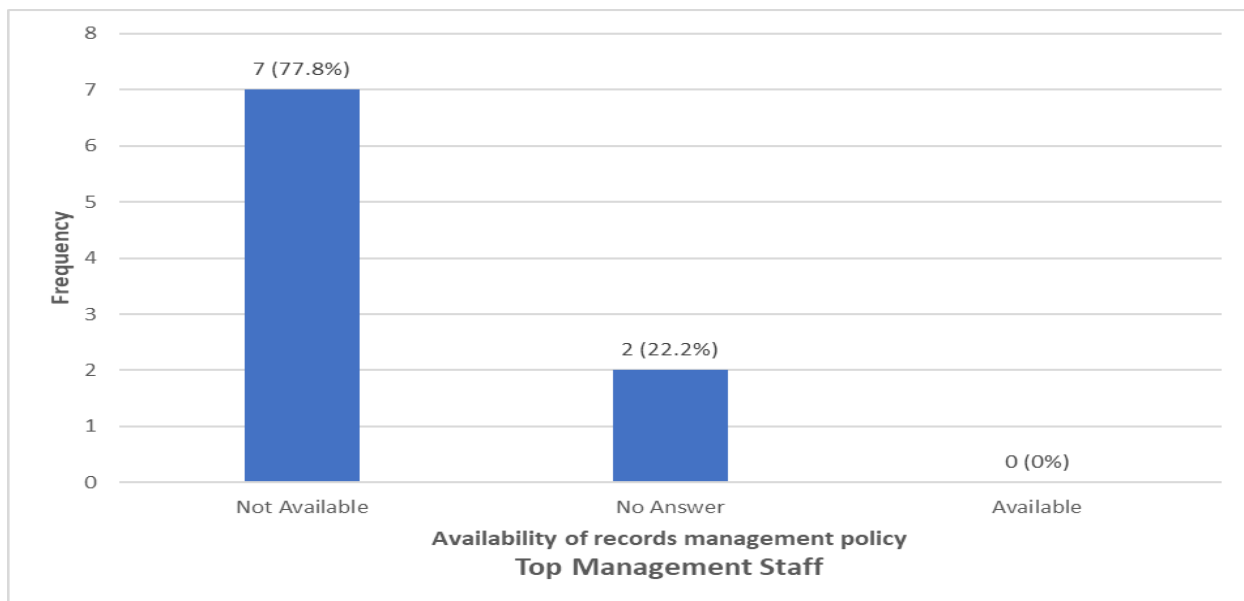
*We do not have a records retention and disposition schedule and there are no definite retention periods for both paper and e-records here at the Council. We also do not have any criteria for disposing of these records but we periodically send non-active records to the National Archives (Respondent 1).*

*We follow Data Management Policy (DMP) which says that we have to keep e-records for five years. The Council do not dispose of financial e-records because DMP indicates that only the Ministry can dispose of. So, the Council sends financial e-records to the Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture (Respondent 2).*

### 5.5 Policy framework governing records management at M’mbelwa District Council

Objective two of this study sought to establish whether there were records management policy, plans and guidelines at the Council. The objective was addressed through Research Question Number 2: *What policy framework is governing records management at M’mbelwa District Council?*

Section C (Question number X) of the questionnaire required top management staff to indicate whether there was a policy regulating records management at the M’mbelwa District Council. Figure 5.4 shows responses.



**Figure 5.4: Availability of policy regulating records management (n = 9)**

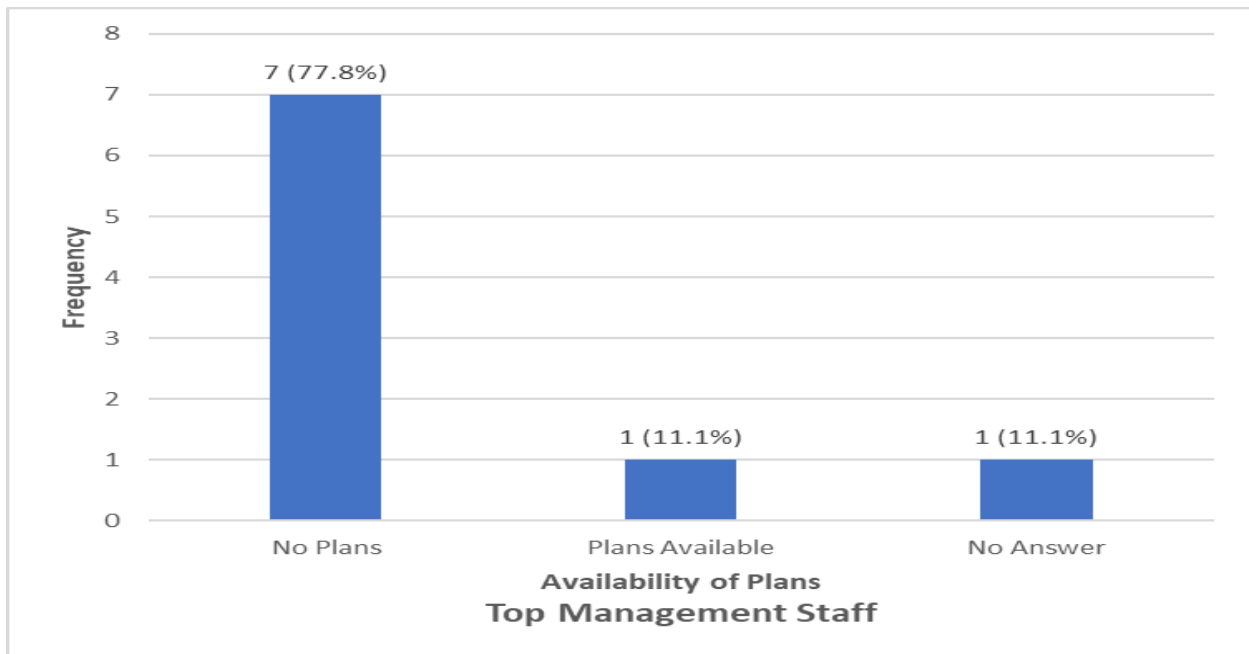
Results presented in Figure 5.4 show that top management staff indicated that a policy was not available, seven (77.8%), two (22.2%) did not respond to this question, and no respondent, (0%) indicated that policy was available. However, two (28.5%) of the respondents who indicated that a policy was not available, mentioned that the council is sometimes regulated by Public Finance Management Act, and National Archives Act.

Qualitative data was also collected from Registry Officer and MISO in Section C (Questions IX, and IX to XI) of the interview guides respectively. Registry Officer was asked to indicate records management policy framework and guidelines for managing records available at the Council. MISO was asked to state any policies, plans and guidelines that support the use of ICTs, and whether the policies, plans and guidelines deal with records management issues. Verbatim responses are presented below:

*There is no records management policy or guidelines for managing records here at the Council. We manage records based on our personal experience (Respondent 1).*

*We have an ICT policy which states that everyone should have an anti-virus, certified software packages, and access to government networks safe and securely. We also have DMP which talks of how we can keep data. We further have Disposal of Assets Policy which works upon directives received from mother Ministry. All these policies affect records management issues. We draw our records management standards or guidelines from ICT policy (Respondent 2).*

Section C (Question number XI) also required top management employees to react on whether the M’mbelwa District Council had any records management plans. The results are presented in Figure 5.5.



**Figure 5.5: Availability of records management plans (n = 9)**

The results presented in Figure 5.5 show that seven (77.8%) of top management staff asserted that there were no plans, one (11.1%) indicated that plans were available and cited a plan to create more records storage space as an example, and finally one (11.1%) did not respond to the question.

To validate responses on the existence of records management policy, plans and guidelines, the researcher also reviewed some documents as indicated below: The Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) No. 4 of 2022. Section 99 (1) of PFMA which stipulates that “a statutory body and state-owned enterprise shall keep proper accounts and records of its transactions and financial positions. The researcher also reviewed the National Archives Act Chapter 28:01 of 2014, Section 11 (1) of Part IV of the Act which stipulates that “the Government Archivist and any officer of the National Archives duly authorised by him, shall be entitled to examine any public records which are in the custody of any Ministry, Department or Agency of the Government or any prescribed body, and to select there from those records which, in his opinion, ought to be deposited and conserved in the National Archives and direct their transfer accordingly. National ICT Policy, DMP and Disposal of Assets Policy were reviewed as well. The researcher noted that pertinent issues pertaining to these policies were clearly elaborated above by respondent 2.

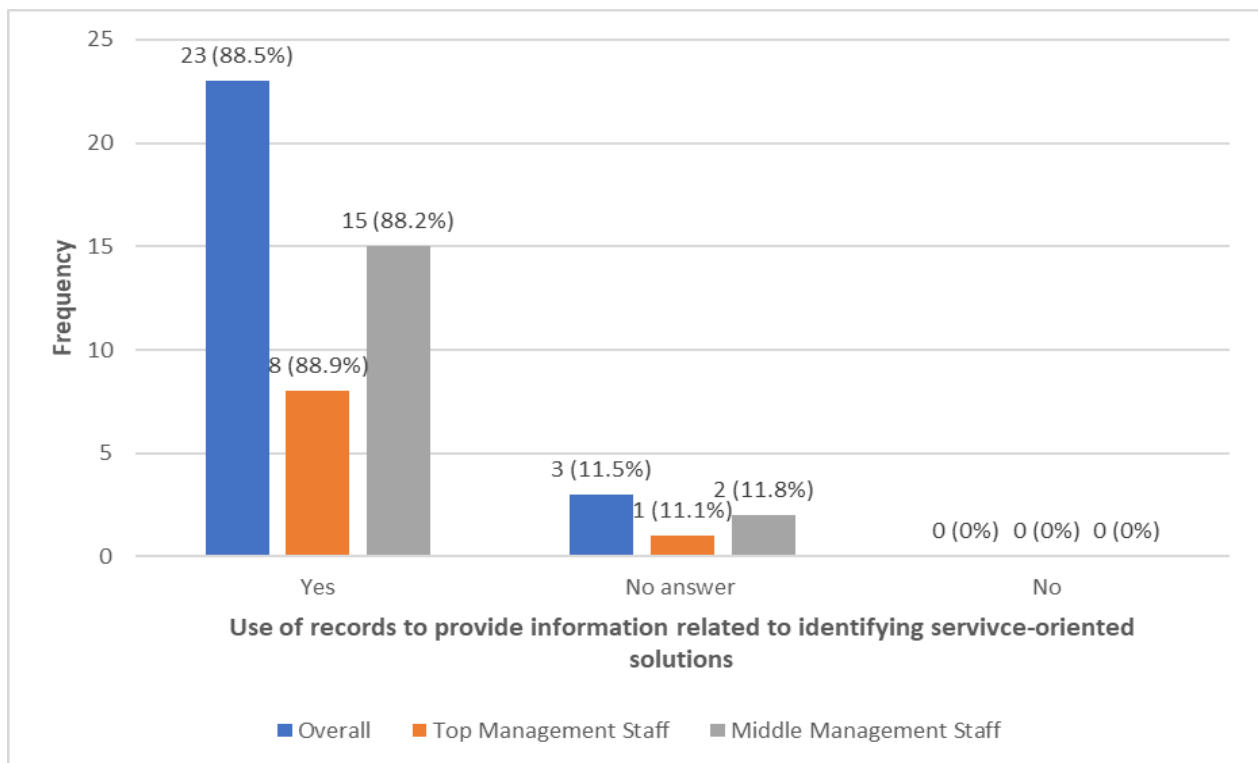
After reviewing the above documents, the researcher found out that even though the documents relate to records management, they cannot be equated to records management policy, plans and guidelines which were supposed to be derived from M’mbelwa District Council’s business objectives and supported by business rules or procedures for managing records as indicated by ISO 15489-1 (2016). The researcher therefore concludes that there were indeed no records management policy, plans, and guidelines at M’mbelwa District Council.

### **5.6 Benefits of effective records management on service delivery at M’mbelwa District Council.**

Objective three of this study sought to establish benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery at M’mbelwa District Council. Top and middle management staff were asked in Section D (Questions XII and X) of the questionnaires respectively to indicate on whether district council records were being used to provide information related to identifying service-oriented solutions to improve council’s service delivery. Figure 5.6 presents the results.

Results presented in Figure 5.6 show that respondents indicated that records were being used to provide information related to identifying service-oriented solutions, 23 (88.5%), three (11.5%) did not respond to the question, and no respondent selected the “No” option.

On individual categories, eight (88.9%) top management staff indicated that records were being used to provide information related to identifying service-oriented solutions, two (11.1%) did not respond to the question, and no respondent selected the “No” option. Fifteen (88.2%) of the middle management staff also indicated that records were being used to provide information related to identifying service-oriented solutions, two (11.8%) did not respond to the question, and no respondent selected the “No” option. The results assume that records were being used to provide information related to identifying service-oriented solutions.



**Figure 5.6: Use of records to provide information related to identifying service-oriented solutions (n = 26)**

Further, top and middle management staff were asked in Section D (Questions XIII and XI) of the questionnaires respectively to indicate how records help council officials to achieve effective and efficient public service delivery. Table 5.9 shows the results.

Results in Table 5.9 show that respondents indicated that records form a basis for formulation of future plans, 16 (61.5%), basis for making informed decisions, 14 (53.8%), basis for formulation

of policies, 13 (50%), consultation of records is crucial to good service delivery, 12 (46.2%), inaccessibility of records pressures officials to make uninformed service delivery decisions, 10 (38.5%), council cannot function well without records, nine (34.6%), unavailability of records results in delays in dealing with stakeholders' queries, nine (34.6%), no response, five (19.2%), and records cannot ultimately enhance and solve challenges, four (14.4%).

**Table 5.9: How records help officials to achieve effective and efficient public service delivery (n = 26)**

How records help council officials	Overall		Top Management Staff		Middle Management Staff	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Basis for formulation of future plans	16	61.5	6	66.7	10	58.3
Basis for making informed decisions	14	53.8	6	66.7	8	47.1
Basis for formulation of policies	13	50	7	77.8	6	35.3
Consultation of records is crucial for good service delivery	12	46.2	4	44.4	8	47.1
Inaccessibility of records pressures officials to make uninformed service delivery decisions	10	38.5	6	66.7	4	23.5
Council cannot function well without records	9	34.6	6	66.7	3	17.6
Unavailability of records results in delays in dealing with stakeholders' queries	9	34.6	4	44.4	5	29.4
No response	5	19.2	0	0	5	29.4
Records cannot ultimately enhance and solve challenges of service delivery	4	14.4	3	33.3	1	5.9

On individual categories, top management staff indicated that records help council officials in formulation of policies, seven (77.8%), formulation of future plans, six (66.7%), making informed decisions, six (66.7%), reducing pressure that comes with inaccessible records, six (66.7%), helping council to function well, six (66.7%), consultation with records available being crucial to good service delivery, four (44.4%), unavailability of records resulting in delays in dealing with stakeholders' queries, four (44.4%), records cannot ultimately enhance and solve challenges of service delivery, three (33.3%), and 0 (0%) did not respond to the question.



Middle management staff indicated that records formed the basis for formulation of future plans, ten (58.8%), basis for making informed decisions, eight (47.1%), consultation of records available is crucial for good service delivery, eight (47.1%), basis for formulation of policies, six (35.3%), unavailability of records resulting in delays in dealing with stakeholders' queries, five (29.4%), no response, five (29.4%), inaccessibility of records pressures officials to make uninformed decisions regarding service delivery, four (23.5%), council cannot function well without records, three (17.6%), and records cannot ultimately enhance and solve challenges of service delivery, one (5.9%). The results from this section suggest that there was a positive relationship between records management and service delivery at the Council.

Qualitative data were also collected from Registry Officer and MISO, Section D (Questions X, and XII) of the interview guides respectively. Registry Officer and MISO were asked to indicate the policies and plans top management were making after consulting the Council records. Results are presented in the verbatims below:

*Top management staff consult records from the registry when making various decisions. For example, when they want to make recruitment policies and plans, they request recruitment and personal files records. They also formulate tendering policies and plans based on tendering records available. Top management staff also use projects records to formulate development policies and plans (Respondent 1).*

*Top management staff request revenue collection records when formulating revenue collection and business regulations policies and plans. They also use projects financial records to make development plans (Respondent 2).*

## **5.7 Factors that contribute to effective records management at M'mbelwa District Council**

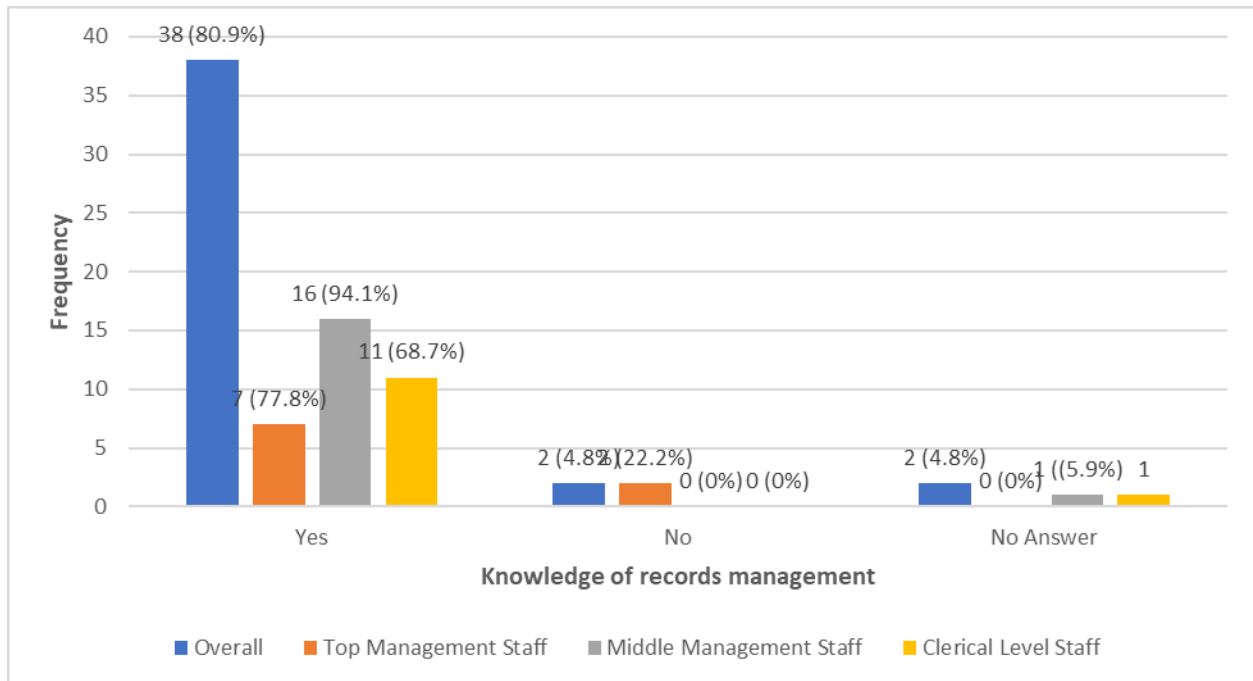
Objective four of this study sought to find out the respondents' knowledge in records management practices, how they attained records management knowledge, their skills in records management practices, infrastructure available for records management, and top management support for records management activities at M'mbelwa District Council.

### 5.7.1 Knowledge about records management practices

In this section, the first question intended to find out whether top, middle, and clerical level staff had knowledge about records management practices. Results are presented in Figure 5.7.

The results in Figure 5.7 show that most respondents had knowledge in records management, 38 (80.9%), two (4.8%) did not have knowledge, and two (4.8%) did not respond to the question.

On individual category results, top management staff indicated that they had knowledge of records management practices, seven (77.8%), two (22.2%) did not, and no response, 0 (0%). Middle management staff indicated that they were knowledgeable about records management practices, sixteen (94.1%), no response, one (5.9%), and not knowledgeable, 0 (0%). Clerical level staff also indicated that they had knowledge in records management practices, eleven (68.8%), four (25%) did not, and no response, one (6.3%). Results indicate that majority of the respondents had knowledge of records management practices. This is in line with RCM's identity axis which states that actors who are all members of an organisation, are supposed to be knowledgeable in records management practices.



**Figure 5.7: Knowledge about records management practices by (n = 42)**

A follow-up question intended to ascertain how top, middle and clerical level staff in Section E (Questions XV), Section D (Question XIII) and Section C (Question XI) of the questionnaires

respectively, became knowledgeable about records management practices was posed. The results are presented in Table 5.10.

Results presented in Table 5.10 indicate that respondents became knowledgeable of records management practices through on-the-job training, 23 (54.8%), workshop-based training, 16 (38.1%), introductory sessions training, nine (21.4%), six (14.3%) did not respond to the question, one-on-one training, five (11.9%), and in depth/formal training, five (7.1%).

On individual categories, top management staff attained records management practices knowledge through on-the-job training, eight (88.9%), workshop-based training, four (44.4%), introductory-sessions training, three (33.3%), one-on-one training, one (11.1%), in-depth trainings, one (11.1%), and no response, 0 (0%). Middle management staff indicated to have attained records management practices knowledge through workshop-based trainings, nine (52.9%), on-the-job training, seven (41.2%), introductory-sessions training, three (17.6%), no response, two (11.8%), in-depth training, one (5.9%), and one-on-one training, 0 (0%). Clerical level staff indicated to have obtained knowledge of records management practices through on-the-job training, eight (50%), one-on-one training, four (25%), workshop-based, three (18.8%), no response, four (25%), introductory-sessions training, three (18.8%), formal training, one (6.3%). These results entail that majority of the respondents attained records management practices knowledge through on-the-job and workshop-based trainings. One respondent who indicated to have attained records management practices knowledge through formal training possesses a certificate in records and archives management but does not work in the registry.

**Table 5.10: How respondents became knowledgeable of records management practices (n = 42)**

Attainment of knowledge	Overall		Top Management Staff		Middle Management Staff		Clerical Level Staff	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
On-the-job training	23	54.8	8	88.9	7	41.2	8	50
Workshop-based training	16	38.1	4	44.4	9	52.9	3	18.8
Introductory-sessions training	9	21.4	3	33.3	3	17.6	3	18.8
No response	6	14.3	0	0	2	11.8	4	25
One-on-one training	5	11.9	1	11.1	0	0	4	25
In depth/formal training	3	7.1	1	11.1	1	5.9	1	6.3

### **5.7.2 Staff competencies and skills in records management**

Section E (Questions XI-XVI, and XII-XVII) of interview guides respectively intended to ascertain the skills of Registry Officer and MISO in records management practices, how they acquired those skills, and whether they had any qualifications in records management. The responses are indicated in the verbatims below:

*I have moderate skills in records appraisal, records organisation, records filing, records management system administration routines, records retention, records archiving, and records disposition which I acquired through workshops I attended, and on the job experience. I am poorly skilled in records survey, digital preservation, metadata standards, and disaster preparedness. I do not have any formal qualification in records management, I have a diploma in human resource development. I am the in-charge of the registry, I supervise about six registry clerks, and none of them has a formal qualification in records management (Respondent 1).*

*I have databases and other ICT skills which would help in e-records management. I got these skills from some of the courses in the bachelor's degree in business information technology I did. I do not have any formal qualification in records management but I attended some workshops on IFMIS management (Respondent 2).*

Results show that there is lack of qualified staff in records management at M'mbelwa District Council.

### **5.7.3 Infrastructure available for records management**

Managing records include usage of both ICT and non-ICT infrastructure. This section intended to find out the infrastructure available at M'mbelwa District Council that facilitate management of records. This item was captured in Section E (Questions XVI, XIV, and XII) of the questionnaires for top, middle and clerical staff respectively, and also captured in Section E (Questions XV and XVI) of the interview guides for Registry Officer and MISO. Quantitative results are presented in Table 5.11.

Results presented in Table 5.11 show that respondents indicated the availability of office computers, 26 (61.9%), Internet, 26 (61.9%), printers, 25 (59.5%), personal computers, 18

(42.9%), ERMS 17 (40.5%), electronic records backup system, 14 (33.3%), scanners, 11 (26.2%), no response, six (14.3%), cloud computing, two (4.8%), and CDROMs, one (2.4%).

On individual categories, top management staff opined that the following ICT infrastructure were available; printers, eight (88.9%), office computers, eight (88.9%), Internet, seven (77.8%), personal computers, seven (77.8%), ERMS, five (55.6%), electronic record backup system, five (55.6%), scanners, four (44.4%), cloud computing, two (22.2%), CDROMs, 0 (0%), and no response, 0(0%). Middle management staff indicated availability of printers, ten (58.8%), office computers, nine (52.9%), Internet, nine (52.9%), personal computers, nine (52.9%), ERMS, six (35.3%), electronic record backup system, four (23.5%), scanners, four (23.5%), no response, two (11.8%), and no one, 0 (0%) mentioned cloud computing and CDROMs. Clerical level staff indicated the availability of Internet, ten (62.5%), office computers, nine (56.2%), printers, seven (43.8%), ERMS, six (37.5%), electronic record backup system, five (31.2%), no response, four (25%), scanners, three (18.8%), personal computers, two (12.5%), CDROMs, one (6.2%), and no one, 0 (0%) mentioned cloud computing.

**Table 5.11: ICT infrastructure available for management of records (n = 42)**

Infrastructure available	Overall		Top Management Staff		Middle Management Staff		Clerical Level Staff	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Office computers	26	61.9	8	88.9	9	52.9	9	56.2
Internet	26	61.9	7	77.8	9	52.9	10	62.5
Printers	25	59.5	8	88.9	10	58.8	7	43.8
Personal computers	18	42.9	7	77.8	9	52.9	2	12.5
ERMS	17	40.5	5	55.6	6	35.3	6	37.5
Electronic record backup system	14	33.3	5	55.6	4	23.3	5	31.2
Scanners	11	26.2	4	44.4	4	23.5	3	18.8
No response	6	14.3	0	0	2	11.8	4	25
Cloud computing	2	4.8	2	22.2	0	0	0	0
CDROMs	1	2.4	0	0	0	0	1	6.2

Qualitative results from Registry Officer and MISO are presented in verbatims below:

*We have computers, disks, Internet, lockable wooden filing cabinets, wooden shelves, lockable wooden drawers, files, and folders (Respondent 1).*

*There are computers, IFMIS server, database system, and Internet which we use for managing financial e-records. Financial paper records are managed using files, folders, wooden drawers and shelves (Respondent 2).*

The results denote the availability of miscellaneous infrastructure that facilitate the management of records at M’mbelwa District Council, however, the infrastructure at the Council is not adequate.

#### 5.7.4 Top management support for records management

This section intended to find out top management support for records management at M’mbelwa District Council. A question was posed to top, middle and clerical level staff as captured in Section E (Questions XXVII, XXV and XII) of the questionnaires respectively. Results are presented in Table 5.12.

**Table 5.12: Top management support on records management (n = 42)**

Management support	Overall		Top Management Staff		Middle Management Staff		Clerical Level Staff	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Provision of specific budget lines	24	57.1	4	44.4	11	64.7	9	56.2
Approval of formal policies	18	42.9	2	22.2	8	47.1	8	50
Endorsement of projects	18	42.9	0	0	9	52.9	9	56.2
No answer	16	38.1	3	33.3	5	29.4	8	50
Funding of specialist trainings	15	35.7	2	22.2	6	35.3	7	43.8

Results in Table 5.12 show that respondents indicated that there was top management support through provision of specific budget lines 24 (57.1%), approval of formal policies, 18 (42.9%), endorsement of projects, 18 (42.9%), no answer, 16 (38.1%), and funding specialist training, 15 (35.7%). On individual categories, top management staff indicated that they provided specific budget lines for records management activities, four (44.4%), provided funding for specialist

trainings, two (22.2%), approved formal policies, two (22.2%), no response, three (33.3%), and endorsed projects, 0 (0%). Middle management staff indicated that top management at M'mbelwa District Council provided specific budget lines for records management activities, eleven (64.7%), endorsed records management projects, nine (52.9%), approved formal policies, eight (47.1%), and funding for specialist records keeping trainings, six (35.3%). Clerical level staff indicated that top management at the Council provided specific budget lines, nine (56.2%), endorsed projects, nine (56.2%), approved formal policies, eight (50%), no response, eight (50%), and funding for specialist trainings, seven (43.8%).

Results of interviews with Registry Officer and MISO, Section E (Questions XVI-XVII, and XVII-XVIII) respectively on top management support and whether they were satisfied with funds allocated to records management activities are presented in verbatims below:

*Top management sometimes provide support to records management activities by allowing some registry staff attend records management workshops. I personally attended records management training workshop at Staff Development Institute and National Archives of Malawi. However, registry staff do not frequently attend these trainings due to lack of funds. No registry staff was also given support to attain formal training in records management. There are inadequate computers, other paper records storage facilities, and no dedicated Records Management System. Finally, there are no special funds the Council allocates for records management activities (Respondent 1).*

*As MISO, I have been attending workshops on IFMIS management. I and other ICT staff at the Council have never attended any records management workshop. We receive 1% of M'mbelwa District Council's budget to assist in procuring and updating ICT facilities at the Council. Am not satisfied with this provision of funds since it is not enough to meet all Council's ICT facilities demands including those that can be used to improve records management (Respondent 2).*

The results from this section assume that the support given by top management towards records management activities at the M'mbelwa District Council was not all that enough. This negatively affects the implementation of RCM's create, capture, organise, and pluralise dimensions requirements which recommend staff training, adequate infrastructure, and funds.

## **5.8 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented quantitative data collected from M'belwa District Council staff through questionnaires. The chapter also included qualitative data which was collected from Registry Officer and MISO through interviews. The chapter also presented qualitative data collected through the researcher's observation and document analysis. The next chapter (Chapter Six) discusses the study findings and presents the key findings and recommendations.



## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets and discusses the findings of the study. According to Creswell (2014), interpreting and discussing findings involves providing meaning to results by linking them with the research objectives, theoretical framework, and the existing literature. Guided by the research objectives, the theoretical framework of the study, the RCM, and the existing literature, the findings discussed in this chapter are supported or contradicted with evidence thereby giving meaning to the data generated from the study. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the real significance of the material in the context, to understand implications of the data, to show the values of greatest worth from the research, to refer important generalisations, and to provide hints of conclusions and recommendations of the researcher (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). The discussion was organised around the following objectives:

- To establish the existing records management practices at M’mbelwa District Council.
- To examine the existence of policy framework governing records management at M’mbelwa District Council
- To establish the benefits of effective records management practices on service delivery at M’mbelwa District Council.
- To investigate factors that contribute to effective records management at M’mbelwa District Council.

#### 6.2 Demographic profile of respondents

Section A of the questionnaires and interview schedules ascertained demographic characteristics of the respondents including gender, work experience, and highest education qualification. Mensah and Adjei (2014) note that “demographic variables such as gender, work experience, and highest level of education have positive relationships with a commitment to work. Therefore, respondents’ demographic profiles were considered important when establishing the current records management practices at M’mbelwa District Council.

The study established that the most respondents were males. This could mean that M’mbelwa District Council has more male dominance despite the heavy campaign of gender equality in

Malawi. The gender imbalance may prejudice the discussion of the findings towards males. The gender representation in the present study agrees with the findings of a mixed methods study undertaken by Malanga and Kamanga (2019) at Karonga District Council in Malawi which also established that there were more male than female employees at the Council. The current findings also indicated that most staff at M'belwa District Council had 11 to 20 years of work experience. This assumes that most of the staff had sufficient work experience in dealing with council records to provide the needed information about this study. The study further revealed that most council employees had bachelors' degrees followed by diplomas. The respondents' high levels of education enabled this researcher to assume that the expected usage of e-records would be high.

### **6.3 Existing records management practices at M'belwa District Council**

This objective intended to establish the existing records management practices at M'belwa District Council with a focus on records created or received; records storage and maintenance; records access and security; and records retention and disposal.

#### **6.3.1 Records created or received**

This section aimed at ascertaining the types of records created or received at M'belwa District Council, their formats, and how they are captured. The study found that different types of records were being created and received at the Council. The most produced or transacted records were minutes, emails, reports, staff appraisal, leave applications, receipts, appointment letters, assets registers, government circulars, policy manuals, attendance reports, requisitions, correspondences, and instructions. These records were being generated in both paper and electronic formats. These hybrid records were being captured using office computers, personal computers, IFMIS, personal cellphones, notebooks with carbon copies, official receipt books, and notebooks without carbon copies.

Business transactions fully captured as records are sources of information that must reliably inform M'belwa District Council's strategic decision making. The current study and the studies cited indicate that both paper and electronic records were being generated. This is due to the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) which enable institutions

such as district councils to create both paper and electronic records. However, the absence of a records management system at M'mbelwa District Council which could be very useful in capturing records, has forced staff at the council to be using basic technologies such as personal cellphones and computers in capturing records which complicates records organisation and management. Use of basic technologies at M'mbelwa District Council is not in line with Malawi's 2063 Vision Enabler Number 2, which is, effective governance systems and institutions, which promotes harnessing of new technologies, including the use of digital platforms to ensure that information is readily available and reducing costs associated with provision of public information (National Planning Commission, 2020).

The present findings are similar to those of a qualitative study by Ginsberg (2016) in the USA which found that local authorities generated both paper and electronic records in form of financial records, memoranda, minutes, emails, and reports. These were being captured using computers. Similarly, a qualitative study by Frings-Hessami and Oliver (2022) revealed that municipalities in Switzerland created records such as circulars, policy manuals, reports, requisitions, and correspondences. However contrary to the present findings some municipalities in Switzerland captured records using ERMS.

These findings partly support findings of a quantitative study by Molepo and Cloete (2017) in Ga Molepo, South Africa, which revealed that both paper and electronic records such as correspondences, instructions, and invoices were being generated. Molepo and Cloete (2017) also found that notebooks without carbon copies, personal cellphones, and computers were being used in capturing the records. Further, current findings echo those of a quantitative study by Obulor et al. (2021) at OENLGA Council, Nigeria which established that several records were being generated including requisitions, correspondences, instructions, invoices, and appointment letters. It was further revealed that these records were being captured using physical folders, computers, and scanners. The similarities in the findings of the current study to the cited studies may be because most local authorities create and capture comparable records since they share similar functions of providing effective, efficient, and sustainable socio-economic services that intend to improve the livelihood of people in their communities.

The findings of the present study are in line with the RCM's capture dimension, which involves organisations entering records generated into its record-keeping system where they are kept as evidence of some transactions that took place during their creation (Joanne et. al., 2017). From

the findings of the present study, M'belwa District Council mostly captures records using basic technologies and manual ways as opposed to an electronic records management system as recommended by RCM's capture dimension. The implication of the informal capturing of records at M'belwa District Council is that it would become difficult to have evidence and continuity of business activities as advanced by RCM's evidentiality axis. However, the current study partly conforms to RCM's capture dimension as it was revealed that IFMIS was available for capturing financial e-records at M'belwa District Council. The unfortunate part is that IFMIS was only being used in the capturing of financial e-records leaving out other administrative records which were also being produced in large numbers. It is therefore exceedingly difficult for M'belwa District Council to trace and manage those other records that are not captured into the Council's IFMIS system.

### **6.3.2 Records storage and maintenance**

This section sought to find out the storage facilities and areas for both paper and electronic records at M'belwa District Council. On paper records storage facilities, the present study found that most council staff kept records in office files, office shelves, office folders, office drawers, office metallic filing cabinets, and registry office facilities. For e-records storage, the study found that the most used storage facilities were personal computers, office computers, flash drives, registry office computers, IFMIS, and IT office computers.

Usage of disintegrated paper records storage facilities including office facilities instead of registry facilities makes the management of records cumbersome. It is difficult to organise and audit paper records whose storage facilities are scattered in various places. Further, use of disintegrated e-records storage facilities instead of a dedicated storage system such as an ERMS also compromises proper management of e-records at the Council. The disintegrated records storage facilities at M'belwa District Council, may contribute to serious challenges in organising, protecting, and providing access to records.

The findings of the current study are in sharp contrast with those of Ali et al. (2020) which found that cloud computing was being used as dedicated storage facility for records in the Australian local government. Similarly, the present findings contradict the findings of a mixed methods study by Calvin (2018) which ascertained that at Mbale Local Government in Uganda, records

were being stored using a centralised storage system for all departments under the custodian of a district records manager. These records were being stored in registry office using boxes, some placed on shelves, metallic filing cabinets, and open cupboards.

The RCM's evidentiality axis propagates that records represent both individual and corporate memory. Storage of paper records in individual offices' storage facilities instead of registry storage facilities as recommended by the RCM's recordkeeping containers axis, threatens the storage and maintenance of records. The present findings are also against RCM's recordkeeping containers axis recommendation that an institution should have a dedicated e-records storage facility such as an ERMS rather than having disintegrated e-records storage media.

The present findings also showed that although registry was available for storage of records, a majority of council staff chose to store records in their respective offices, and some kept them in council storerooms.

In order to make sure that records are quickly retrieved when requested, proper records management practices must be implemented, and this includes having proper records storage places. The National Archives Act of Malawi (2014) clearly stipulates that the records office is the official location where records are kept. To the contrary, the present study found that most council staff were storing records in their offices and others in the storerooms. This clearly shows that the registry office was not being fully used as a dedicated records storage place at M'mbelwa District Council. The council employees moved the records to the storerooms when there was no more space in their offices. Regrettably, the records in the storerooms competed for space with non-records materials such as chairs and old computers and such records were neither arranged nor documented. Therefore, the way in which records at M'mbelwa District Council are stored could not guarantee that they could be maintained to remain authentic and trustworthy.

The findings of the current study are similar to those of a quantitative study by Ali et al. (2021) at Queensland state local councils in Australia which found that there were no dedicated storage facilities in most of the local councils. Similarly, the findings of the current study resemble those of a study by Sigauke (2022) in Zimbabwe which found that ten government departments that participated in the study did not have central repositories for the storage of digital records. However, contrary to the present findings, the departments had central repositories for paper records. The present findings also concur with those of a mixed methods study by Marwa (2015) at Temeke Municipal Council (TMC), in Tanzania which found that offices were being used as

records storage places. However, the findings of the current study are in sharp contrast with those of a mixed methods study by Ali et al. (2020) which found that local government authorities in Australia used cloud computing for storing records which enhanced records security and accessibility.

The present findings also contradict the construct of the RCM's organise dimension which discourages storage of records in offices or storerooms. RCM's organise dimension recommends that there has to be a dedicated place for storing records such as a records/registry office for storing all institutional records. The current study assumes that some records at M'mbelwa District Council can be lost or get damaged because individual office owners and stores clerks are not professional records managers.

On the control of temperature and relative humidity for records storage places, the study found that the registry office, financial records archives room, and the IFMIS server room did not have any measures to control temperature and relative humidity.

Weather can threaten the lifespan of a record if not controlled. This entails that both paper and electronic records at M'mbelwa District Council are at threat due to the absence of temperature and relative humidity control measures such as air conditioners, fans, and dehumidifiers. For instance, high temperatures may cause paper records to be crispy. The same can also be said for digital records. According to World Bank (as cited in Chikomba, 2018), slight changes in temperature and relative humidity can disturb the magnetic properties of disks and tapes leading to the loss of some or all the records.

The present findings slightly differ with those of a quantitative study by Xiao et al. (2021) in China which established that some local authorities' archives had protective devices for records from impact of severe indoor climatic conditions such as temperature and relative humidity, water, dust, ultraviolet, and radiation. However, percentages of archives with these protective devices show that some archives did not have the protective devices hence exposing records to the impact of severe indoor climate conditions. Similarly, Marwa (2015) also observed that at Temeke Municipal Council (TMC), in Tanzania, all records offices lacked air conditioning machines and dehumidifiers to regulate the levels of both temperatures and relative humidity.

Absence of temperature and relative humidity control measures at M'mbelwa District Council is against the RCM's evidentiality dimension which encourages organisations to protect records from adverse temperature and relative humidity at all times to maintain their evidential value.

The council is, therefore, likely to lose its individual and corporate memory hidden in its records due to uncontrolled temperature and relative humidity they are being exposed to.

### **6.3.3 Records access and security**

This section solicited qualitative data on records access, procedures followed to access records, and tools used for searching and tracking records. The findings from interviews indicated that only authorised personnel had access to the records storage area. Authorised personnel could access records using in-person access to records during business hours, where information seekers visit registry office during business hours and ask for records, and in-person access to records by appointment, where information seekers book appointment from authorities before accessing records from the registry office. The study also found that file index is used to search for paper records, and records register book is used to track them. Further, serial numbers were being used when searching for financial e-records in the IFMIS system and that on the issue tracking of e-records, there were footprints on how records were being accessed from the IFMIS. Managing access and use of records is an important aspect of records management since records can only be useful to the council if the various users of the records can access them in a timely manner. ISO 15489-1 (2016) opines that records systems should therefore, provide timely, controlled and efficient access to, and retrieval of records in support of the organisation's business transaction and in meeting accountability and regulatory requirements. Records personnel are supposed to take reasonable steps to protect the personal and confidential information they hold from misuse and loss as well as from unauthorised access and modification or disclosure. However, controlling access and ensuring security of public records must be done without flouting the requirement of Malawi's Access to Information Act of 2017, specifically, Section 5 (1) which promotes person's right to access information which is in the custody, or under control of a public body (Access to Information Act, 2017, p. 5).

The present findings on records access concur with those of a study by Xiao et al. (2021) in China which found that there were controls provided for records that were only accessible by authorised personnel through in-person access to records during business hours, and in-person access to records by appointment. However, contrary to the present findings, Xiao et al. (2021) found that open access records requests, and online access were being used in China. Present

findings also echo those of a study by Ali et al. (2021) in Australia which found that local councils records were being accessed using in-person access during business hours, and in-person access by appointment. Nevertheless, contrary to the current findings, digitised records in Australian local councils were also being accessed online. The findings of the current study also agree with those of a mixed methods study by Thanye et al. (2015) at Gaborone City Council (GCC) in Botswana which found that records were being accessed by authorised personnel only using whether in person access during business hours or by appointment.

Basing on the RCM's pluralise dimension, records storage facilities are supposed to facilitate the smooth, continued, and controlled accessibility of records (Makgahlela, 2021). The use of print file index and register book to search and track paper records at M'mbelwa District Council runs short of the RCM's evidentiality axis requirement which encourages the automated system of storage of records for easy searching, tracking and access. Use of serial numbers for searching e-records and availability of footprints for record tracking in the IFMIS partly supports the RCM's evidentiality requirement, however, IFMIS is only used to manage financial e-records leaving out other equally important e-records.

On security of records, the current study found that records were protected from unauthorised access by using locks to secure records storage rooms, locking records up in cabinets, and use of passcodes to access e-records. To avoid loss of financial e-records, daily backups were being sent to the server designated at the then Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture. The Ministry was sending backups to a server that is in Tanzania. However, the study discovered that there were no disaster control measures, such as disaster preparedness plan, fire alarms, and fire extinguishers.

Lack of records security controls in organisations exposes organisations to losing private and confidential records of individuals and the organisation. All records need to be always secured to ensure their authenticity and reliability. If records are not properly secured, they may be tampered with thereby losing their originality or they may be stolen.

The present findings partly concur with those Xiao et al. (2021) in China which found that digital signature, identity authentication technology, and backups were being used to ensure that electronic records are secured. However, findings of the current study show that backup was being done on financial e-records only. Further, present findings aver those of Marwa (2015) which revealed that most records offices at Temeke Municipal Council in Tanzania had grills on



their entrances which were securely padlocked whenever the rooms were not in use. However, just as at M'mbelwa District Council, all records offices studied at Temeke Municipal Council in Tanzania, did not have firefighting equipment such as fire extinguishers. Present findings also partially agree with the findings of a study by Malanga and Kamanga (2019) at Karonga District Council in Malawi which found that security measures to protect e-records were average in that there were some control measures such as computer passwords to e-records access. However, the present findings are contrary to those of a qualitative study by Magama (2018) in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe which revealed that there was unauthorised access to records, deletion of records, migration errors, and that files were left open on shared client computers.

Use of locks to secure records storage rooms and locking records up in cabinets is in line with RCM's pluralise dimension which advocates for controlled access to records. However, use of passcodes by MISO only in accessing e-records from IFMIS server do not fully meet the RCM's pluralisation dimension requirement which promotes controlled access to e-records by encouraging the use of a recordkeeping system where authorised users can log in using usernames and passwords as opposed to monopolising access to IFMIS e-recordkeeping system.

#### **6.3.4 Records retention and disposal**

This section sought information on the availability of records retention and disposition schedule, and whether there are records retention periods at M'mbelwa District Council. The current study found that M'mbelwa District Council did not have a records retention and disposition schedule and there were no definite retention periods for both paper and electronic records. Also, the Council did not have any criteria for disposing of both paper and electronic records though it periodically sends non-active paper records to National Archives. It was however, noted that the Council follows Data Management Policy which requires it to keep financial e-records for five years and then send them to the Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture which has the authority to dispose of e-records.

The findings of the study show that the management of records at M'mbelwa District Council is still in its infancy stage. Lack of retention and disposition schedule may result into the council either failing to destroy records which are no longer needed to support the day-to-day business operations, or it may be forced to take disposal decisions on an ad hoc basis without observing

any aspect of disposal criteria. Keeping unnecessary records eats up valuable space/memory, may incur unnecessary costs, and cause difficulties in retrieving records. Ad hoc disposal of records on the other hand, may result in the council destroying ephemeral records together with those that have enduring value. This may result in the council being unable to defend itself if liability claims are made against its services or the actions of its members of staff.

The findings of the present study concur with those of Frings-Hessami and Oliver (2022) which found that municipalities in Switzerland did not have records disposition schedule. However, the present findings are contrary to those of a quantitative study by Franks (2015) in Canada which revealed that cloud computing services allowed records and backups to be deleted according to a retention and disposition schedule. Further, the current study findings are in sharp contrast with those of mixed methods studies by Makgahlela (2021) and Malatji and Marutha (2023) conducted in selected municipalities in Limpopo Province of South Africa which found that retention and disposal schedules were available in the municipalities studied. Finally, the present findings show that M'mbelwa District Council is not even guided by Access to Information Act of 2017 which orders every information holder to maintain information for a period of seven years and there after transfer it to National Archives (Access to Information Act, 2017).

The absence of records retention and disposal schedule at M'mbelwa District Council is against the principle of RCM's organise dimension which encourages the formulation of retention and disposition schedule in organisations. The current study also found that M'mbelwa District Council only used related policy documents such as Data Management Policy that could not sufficiently replace records retention and disposal schedule and address the expectations of the RCM. The active, semi-active, and inactive stages of records may not be clearly defined by the Data Management Policy. Such lack of retention and disposition schedule impacted on the illegal retention and disposition of records which opposes RCM prescriptions.

#### **6.4 Policy framework governing records management at M'mbelwa District Council**

The current study found that there was no policy guiding records management at M'mbelwa District Council. The study also found that there were no records management guidelines and plans at the Council and that the council was sometimes regulated by the Public Finance Management Act, and National Archives Act. It was further revealed that there was an ICT

policy, Data Management Policy, and Disposal of Assets Policy that guided records management. The study further found that all these related Acts and policy documents cannot be equated to records management policy, guidelines and plans which were supposed to be derived from M'mbelwa District Council's business objectives and supported by business rules or procedures for managing records as indicated by ISO 15489-1 (2016).

ISO 15489-1 (2016) provides that an organisation seeking to put in place a sound records management strategy should first and foremost establish, document, maintain and promulgate policies procedures and practices for records management to ensure that its business need for evidence, accountability and information about its activities is met. The absence of a records policy, guidelines, and plans at M'mbelwa District Council means that, the proper management of records at the Council is still evolving as it is being done without any form of guidelines. According to Chikomba (2018) it is like implementation first then regularise later, that is, "putting the cart before the horse." Things happening in an inverted order. This may also mean that the activities capturing important council information may have been overlooked in most cases. As a result, vital records may not be available when needed and this may negatively affect the Council's decision-making process.

The findings of the current study contradict those of Ginsberg's (2016) study in the USA which found that federal records were admirably managed with the help of policies and guidelines. Present findings are also against those of Western Australia Auditor General (2019) which found that local governments had recordkeeping plans approved by the State Records Commission, as a requirement. The current findings also partly differ with those of Xiao et al. (2021) in China which found that work plans for records preservation were available. However, as in present findings, it was found that some local authorities did not have work plans for preservation of electronic records. Present findings are also in sharp contrast to those of a survey and mixed methods studies by Adusei and Senyah (2022) in Ghana, and Malatji and Marutha (2023) in South Africa which discovered that there were policies, guidelines and procedures for creating and storing records at Offinso Municipal Assembly (OMA) and Limpopo provincial government. However, the present findings concur with those of qualitative and mixed methods studies by Kashaija (2022) in Tanzania, and Makwae (2021) in Kenya. The studies revealed that the institutions studied did not have written manuals on records management policies, plans and guidelines for management of both paper and electronic records. However, contrary to the

present findings, Makwae (2021) found that Garissa County, in Kenya had a draft policy which was awaiting review and final approval.

The present findings are not compliant with RCM's organisational dimension which recommends the formulation of a records management policy, guidelines and plans in any institution. For an institution to achieve efficient and continued access to the records it generates, there is need for a policy guiding the overall handling of the records to ensure their continued access and usability (Ravenwood et al., 2015). Among other benefits of the RCM are enabling integrated policy making and policy implementation (Jaakonmäki et al., 2018; Phiri, 2016). The results from the study show that M'belwa District Council is missing out on crucial benefits models such as the RCM accord organisational records management practices.

## **6.5 Benefits of records management practices on service delivery at M'belwa District**

### **Council**

The current study found that there was a connection between public records management and government service delivery at M'belwa District Council. It was found that records were being used to provide information related to identifying service-oriented solutions at the Council. The current study also found that records helped council officials in the formulation of policies and plans on recruitment, tendering, development as well as business regulation, making informed decisions, reducing pressure that comes with inaccessible records, and helping the council to function well. Further, the study established that consultation of records available was regarded to be crucial to good decision making on council's development activities, and unavailability of records resulted in delays in dealing with stakeholders' queries.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (as cited in Makgahlela, 2020) suggests that the key components of responsive service delivery were: transparency, participation, satisfying user requirements, and accessibility. Records at M'belwa District Council are imperative for operational efficiency and administration duties. They support accountability by making the service delivery system more transparent. Accurate and accessible council records reduce the potential for unlawful manipulation resulting from delays, corruption, and inaccuracies. The majority of study participants from M'belwa District Council were of the opinion that records management plays a significant role in enhancing efficiency and effective

service delivery. This is in line with Malawi's 2063 Vision Enabler Number 3, Enhanced Public Sector Performance, which promotes a world class high performing and professional public sector for efficient delivery of public goods and services (National Planning Commission, 2020).

The present findings collaborate with those of Ali et al. (2020) which found that in Australian local governments, records provided critical information to identify service-oriented solutions to improve performance focusing on driving efficiency, improved service delivery, and enhancing the end user service experience. Further, the findings of the current study concur with those of a qualitative study by Makgahlela (2020) in South Africa. The study found that records management was key to fostering enhanced service delivery and that inaccessibility of records occasionally pressured officials and management to make uninformed decisions regarding service delivery allocations. The current findings also echo those of a quantitative study by Mamoti and King (2021) in South Africa which revealed that respondents had used performance information, research reports, service delivery protests reports, and media reports to make service delivery policies and plans.

The present findings slightly differ those of a qualitative study by Mukred et al. (2016) which found that ERMS available in public institutions in Yemen ensured systematic and efficient flow of records that enabled public officials to perform their functions successfully and efficiently. Similarly, present findings slightly differ those of a study by Marwa (2015) in Tanzania which found that the management team believed that the poor state of records had impacted negatively on the Council's day-to-day service delivery related activities.

RCM's evidentiality axis encourages consultation of records that hold corporate and individual memory when making decisions and delivering various services in any organisation. The current findings support the RCM's evidentiality axis since M'mbelwa District Council members of staff admitted that records were being used to attain effective service delivery, good governance, transparency, and accountability. RCM's pluralise dimension requires continuity of records usage for as long as they are useful and valuable. The pluralise dimension ensures societal memory where records constitute evidence of their creators' or accumulators' activities, are consulted by internal and external users.

## **6.6 Factors that contribute to effective records management at M'mbelwa District Council**

This section sought to ascertain factors that contribute to effective records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council. The section investigated on the respondents' knowledge in records management practices, how that knowledge was attained, staff competences and skills in records management, infrastructure available, and top management support on records management activities.

### **6.6.1 Knowledge about records management practices**

The current study found that M'mbelwa District Council employees had knowledge of records management practices which they obtained mostly through on-the-job-training. Few of the council employees got the knowledge through workshop-based training, introductory sessions trainings, one-on-one training, and in-depth trainings. One of the respondents who indicated having received an in-depth training possesses a certificate in records and archives management from University of South Africa (UNISA) though not working in the registry department since the officer got employed using a different qualification.

Knowledge on records management practices plays a crucial part as it affects how records are created, used and disposed of. Therefore, staff with relevant records management practices knowledge are critical to successfully implement good records management.

The present findings concur with those of Xiao et al. (2021) in local authorities in Wuhan, China which found that employees had knowledge of records management practices which they obtained through on-the-job training and seminar. Further, the current findings agree with those of Ali et al. (2021) in Australia which also found that employees had knowledge in records management practices which they got through various types of trainings they received including formal training. The findings of the current study also concur with those of a study by Thanye et al. (2015) which revealed that all records staff at Gaborone City Council in Botswana had knowledge in records management practices obtained through formal trainings. The present findings also agree with those of Calvin (2018) which found that most staff members at Mbale Local Government in Uganda were knowledgeable of records management practices through on-the-job training.

Respondents' attainment of knowledge in records management practices is in line with RCM's identity axis which indicates that records management task is a shared responsibility and actors who are members of an organisation, are supposed to be knowledgeable in records management practices.

### **6.6.2 Staff competencies and skills in records management**

This section intended to ascertain the skills of Registry Officer and MISO in records management, how they acquired those skills and whether they had any formal qualifications in records management. The current study found that the registry officer had moderate skills in records appraisal, records organisation, records filing, records management system administration routines, records retention, records archiving, and records disposition. These skills were acquired through workshops the Registry Officer attended, and through on-the-job experience. However, Registry Officer had no skills in records survey, digital preservation, metadata standards, and disaster preparedness. The Registry Officer did not have any formal qualification in records management but has a diploma in human resource development. The Registry Officer was the in-charge of the registry and was supervising six registry clerks. Unfortunately, none of the registry clerks had a formal qualification in records management as revealed by the Registry Officer and quantitative data collected. On the other hand, the MISO had databases and other ICT skills which the officer got from some courses in business information technology degree programme. Both quantitative and qualitative data collected indicated that MISO and her subordinates did not have any formal qualification in records management but attended some workshops on IFMIS management.

The present findings show that the professional competencies for records personnel at M'mbelwa District Council were relatively low. It could be concluded that low levels of skills in records management could contribute to failure to implement challenging records management tasks. These findings imply that upskilling is a necessity to enable council staff to meet their obligations in their line of work. This is echoed in Malawi's 2063 Vision Enabler Number 5, Human Capital Development, which promotes the Malawian public sector to have a globally competitive and highly motivated human resource (National Planning Commission, 2020).

The present findings differ from the findings of a study by Shepherd et al. (2019) in England which found that some employees interviewed confessed that they were highly skilled in records organisation, appraisal, access, survey, retention, and disposition. Furthermore, the current findings differ from findings of a study by Gibbons and Douglas (2021) in Australia which found that adverts for records management personnel in Australian public authorities including local government required employees to be skilled in records organisation, appraisal, survey, records registration, filing, retention, digitisation, preservation, and disposition. Additionally, it was also found that the records management employees were supposed to have qualifications such as certificate, diploma and degree in records and archives management or information sciences (Gibbons & Douglas, 2021)

The current findings are similar to findings of studies by Netshakhuma (2019) conducted at Mpumalanga Provincial Government Municipalities, in South Africa, and Sigauke (2022) in Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe. The studies established that most of the records managers in Mpumalanga Provincial Government Municipalities lacked skills in digital preservation, disaster preparedness, metadata standards (technical, administrative, structural, descriptive); and metadata extraction, conversion, tools, viewers and related utilities among others. Further, the studies established that all respondents interviewed in Manicaland Province indicated that they lacked the practical skills required in the creation, capture, metadata management, and preservation of digital records as well as basic ICT skills required in the management of digital records. In terms of the professional qualifications, the present findings are dissimilar to those of a study by Thanye et al. (2015) at Gaborone City Council (GCC) in Botswana which revealed that some technicians had diplomas in records and archives management, some artisans had certificates in records and archives management, and one had a degree in library and information studies.

The role of records creators, actors, administrators, and managers is clear and set out in all the four dimensions of the RCM, that is, creation, capture, organisation and pluralisation of records (Makgahlela, 2021). Records personnel or any other staff tasked with creating, receiving, and managing records should be skilled and competent enough to professionally execute all records related tasks. However, with lack of adequate records management training for M'mbelwa District Council staff, it could be a far-fetched illusion to suggest that records are being well managed at the Council. This is against the RCM's identity axis which requires actors, especially



the custodians of records, to be well trained in records management so that they can effectively and efficiently use RCM in managing the records.

### **6.6.3 Infrastructure available for records management**

This section intended to find out the infrastructure available at M'belwa District Council that facilitates the management of records. As for ICT infrastructure, the findings of the present study established the existence of ICT infrastructure in form of computers, printers, Internet, IFMIS, Electronic record backup system, scanners, cloud computing, and CDROMs which facilitate management of records. These ICT infrastructures were however inadequate. Further, the ERMS, which existed in form of IFMIS was being used to manage financial e-records only. In terms of non-ICT infrastructure, the current study found that lockable wooden filing cabinets, wooden shelves, lockable wooden drawers, files, and folders specifically designed for managing records were available at M'belwa District Council. These non-ICT infrastructures were also inadequate.

The present findings indicate that there was no unified system for sharing and managing all types of records at the Council. This brings to question the long-term preservation of records, especially non-financial records often overlooked as expendables at M'belwa district Council. Further, e-records management at M'belwa District Council is often seen as an ICT function and thus, assigned to ICT personnel to the exclusion of registry staff. The Council needs a unified records management system managed by qualified records officers which would normally enact physical and intellectual access restrictions.

The findings of the current study are akin to those of Xiao et al. (2021) in China which found that some non-ICT infrastructure such as boxes, shelves, and metallic filing cabinets were available. However, contrary to the present findings, Xiao et al. (2021) found that some surveyed archives were equipped with an ERMS. Present findings also concur with those of a study by Gupta and Bukhari (2022) in India which found that shelves, filing cabinets, Internet, computers, photocopiers, and scanners were also available. This current study findings also echo those of Kashaija (2022) in Tanzania which found that computers, internet connection, printers and scanners were available at Singida Municipal Council but were found in few offices though such infrastructure were not present in records office. Similarly, the current findings concur with those

of Calvin (2018) in Uganda which found that there were boxes, shelves, metallic filing cabinets, open cupboards, and tables that were being used in managing records. However, the findings of the present study are dissimilar to those of Motlhasedi (2022) in Botswana which revealed that there was poor network connectivity and obsolete hardware and software at Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.

The infrastructure available at the M'mbelwa District Council is not adequate to meet RCM's record keeping containers axis requirement. The Council needs a unified record management system that would regulate what should be captured and what should not.

#### **6.6.4 Top management support for records management**

The current study established that top management sometimes provides support to records management activities by allowing some registry staff attend records management workshops, though not frequently. Further, no registry staff was provided with financial support to attain formal training in records management. The current study also found that top management approves formal policies and effective endorsement of records management projects. This however contradicts with earlier findings, which established that the Council does not have a formal records management policy, plans and guidelines. The study also found that top management does not fully provide resources to acquire adequate infrastructure such as computers, a dedicated records management system, and other paper records storage facilities. Finally, the study found that the Council allocates inadequate funds for records management activities.

Top management support for records management activities is very important for successful implementation of records management programme. Top management support is key to approving funds for records management activities such as training staff, purchase of ICT and non-ICT infrastructure. Top management also plays a vital role in the approval of recruitment and training of records staff.

The current findings differ from those of a study by Xiao et al. (2021) in China which found that there were positive aspects of top management support towards records management, projects being directly instigated and funded, as well as records management practices changes proposed by information managers being facilitated. However, the present findings concur with those of

Gupta and Bukhari (2022) in India which found that there was lack of top management support which hampered the endorsement of policies, the instigation of records management training, and the initiation of electronic records management strategies. The present findings also concur with the findings of a study by Mukred, et al. (2016) in Yemen which found that local government archives repositories and public institutions including local authorities did not have adequate funding. The present findings are also similar to those Ongwenyi et al. (2018) in Kenya. It was observed that top management support on the use of ICTs to support management of records at Nairobi City County was poor. Further, present findings concur with those of Bakare et al. (2016) in Nigeria which found that there was problem of inadequate funding in Sagamu, Remo North and Ikenne. Poor funding for records management activities was also observed in various studies (Edmond, 2015; Makgahlela, 2021; Makwae, 2021).

The creation, capturing, organisation and pluralisation of records as explained in the RCM's dimensions require adequate funding, skilled staff and adequate ICT and non-ICT infrastructure. All these could be made available if top management supports records management activities. However, records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council might not be as holistic as the RCM demands due to several inhibiting factors identified in this section.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

This section provides some reflections into the major findings of the study. The study found that hybrid records were being created and received at M'mbelwa District Council in form of minutes, emails, reports, staff appraisal, leave applications, receipts, appointment letters, assets registers, government circulars, policy manuals, attendance reports, requisitions, correspondences, and instructions. These records were being captured using office computers, personal computers, IFMIS, personal cellphones, notebooks with carbon copies, official receipt books, and notebooks without carbon copies. The study further found that a majority of council employees store records in their respective offices using office files, office shelves, office folders, office drawers, and office metallic filing cabinets for paper records. For e-records the most used storage facilities were personal computers, individual office computers, flash drives, and IFMIS. The study also found that the registry office, financial records archives room, and the IFMIS server room did not have any measures to control temperature and relative humidity.

The study also revealed that only authorised personnel could access records using in-person access to records during business hours, and in-person access to records by appointment. The study further established that file index and records register book were being used to search and track paper records respectively. Further, serial numbers were being used when searching for financial e-records in the IFMIS and that on the issue of e-records tracking, there were footprints on how e-records were being accessed by individuals from the IFMIS server. M'mbelwa District Council did not have records retention and disposition schedule and there were no definite retention periods for both paper and electronic records. The Council did not also have any criteria for disposing of both paper and electronic records, but it periodically sends non-active paper records to National Archives.

The findings of the study also showed that the council did not have specific records management policy, plans and guidelines. The current study further found that there was a connection between public records management and government service delivery at M'mbelwa District Council. Findings also indicate that M'mbelwa District Council employees had knowledge in records management practices which they obtained mostly through on-the-job-training. It was further found that records personnel skills in records management practices ranged from moderate to poor. As for ICT and non-ICT infrastructure, the findings of the present study established the existence of computers, printers, Internet, IFMIS (ERMS), Electronic record backup system, scanners, cloud computing, CDROMs, lockable wooden filing cabinets, wooden shelves, lockable wooden drawers, files, and folders at M'mbelwa District Council. However, the ERMS which existed in form of IFMIS was being used to manage financial e-records only. The current study also found that top management support in terms of funding various records management activities was not enough at M'mbelwa District Council. The study therefore concludes that records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council are not properly organised. The biggest challenge is that most public institutions in Africa do not accord records management function the attention it deserves as other public institutions' administrators mistakenly consider it as a non-core business function in an institution. It is thus imperative for public institutions' administrators to be sensitised on the dangers of ineffective records management practices.

## **6.9 Recommendations**

Based on findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following to M'mbelwa District Council. However, these recommendations may also apply to other public institutions of similar conditions.

- M'mbelwa District Council should formulate records management policy, plans and guidelines.
- M'mbelwa District Council should consider developing a records office as a full department with its own budget vote.
- M'mbelwa District Council should recruit qualified records management professionals to manage records of the Council and work with training institutions such as Mzuzu University to introduce tailor-made specialised short courses to the existing staff on the management of records.
- M'mbelwa District Council should develop a unified records management system that will facilitate the effective creation and capture of all Council records.
- M'mbelwa District Council top management should support records management practices by ensuring that adequate resources and funds are allocated for records management programme.

## **6.10 Areas of further studies**

- Since the study focused on M'mbelwa District Council only, future studies can consider expanding the scope by including other local authorities in Malawi.
- There should be further studies to investigate systems, software, hardware and ICT skills required to help improve records management in district councils in Malawi.
- Further studies should be conducted on the education, training and recruitment, processes of records management staff in district councils in Malawi.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Research Ethics Approval from MZUNIREC



**MZUZU UNIVERSITY**

**DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH**

Mzuzu University  
Private Bag 201  
Luwinga  
Mzuzu 2  
MALAWI  
TEL: 01 320 722  
FAX: 01 320 648

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#### MZUZU UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MZUNIREC)

Ref No: MZUNIREC/DOR/21/91

1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 2022.

Rhodrick Padoni,  
Mzuzu University,  
P/Bag 201,  
Luwinga,  
Mzuzu 2.

Email:  
[rhodrickpadoni@gmail.com](mailto:rhodrickpadoni@gmail.com)

Dear Mr. Padoni,  
**RESEARCH ETHICS AND REGULATORY APPROVAL AND PERMIT FOR  
PROTOCOL REF NO: MZUNIREC/DOR/21/91: RECORDS MANAGEMENT  
PRACTICES AT M'MBELWA DISTRICT COUNCIL IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF  
MALAWI.**

Having satisfied all the relevant ethical and regulatory requirements, I am pleased to inform you that the above referred research protocol has officially been approved. You are now permitted to proceed with its implementation. Should there be any amendments to the approved protocol in the course of implementing it, you shall be required to seek approval of such amendments before implementation of the same.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of issuance of this approval. If the study goes beyond one year, an annual approval for continuation shall be required to be sought from the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) in a format that is available at the Secretariat. Once the study is finalised, you are required to furnish the Committee with a final report of the study. The Committee reserves the right to carry out compliance inspection of this approved protocol at any time as may be deemed by it. As such, you are expected to properly maintain all study documents including consent forms.

**Committee Address:**  
*Secretariat, Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee, P/Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2; E-mail address: [mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw](mailto:mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw)*

Wishing you a successful implementation of your study.

Yours Sincerely,



**Gift Mbwele**

**SENIOR RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR**

**For: CHAIRMAN OF MZUNIREC**

**Committee Address:**

***Secretariat, Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee, P/Bag 201, Luwingu, Mzuzu 2; E-mail address: [mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw](mailto:mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw)***



## Appendix 2: Letter requesting permission to collect data from M'belwa District Council



**MZUZU UNIVERSITY**  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL  
SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION  
SCIENCES

Private Bag 201  
Luwinga  
Mzuzu 2  
MALAWI

Tel: (265) (01) 320 105  
Fax: (265) (01) 320 497/568/505  
Email: [ur@mzuni.ac.mw](mailto:ur@mzuni.ac.mw)

24<sup>th</sup> February 2023

The District Commissioner  
M'belwa District Council  
P.O. Box 132  
Mzimba

**RE: APPLICATION TO COLLECT DATA FROM MEMBERS OF STAFF AT  
M'MBELWA DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Dear Sir,

Reference is made to the above subject.

My name is Rhodrick Andrew Padoni, a student pursuing Master's Degree in Library and Information Science at Mzuzu University. As part of the requirement for the award of the master's degree, I am undertaking a study on "records management practices at M'belwa District Council of the Northern Region of Malawi."

The purpose of this letter is to kindly request a written permission from your office to enable me collect data from your council. Data will be collected through survey questionnaires, interviews, observation and document analysis. Data collected will be treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity.

I shall be grateful for your assistance and I appreciate your cooperation in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Rhodrick A. Padoni  
Email: [padoni.r@mzuni.ac.mw](mailto:padoni.r@mzuni.ac.mw)  
Or [rhodrickpadoni@gmail.com](mailto:rhodrickpadoni@gmail.com)  
Cell: 0888588861/0999028889

Supervisor  
Associate Professor George Chipeta  
Email: [gchipeta5@gmail.com](mailto:gchipeta5@gmail.com)  
Or [Chipeta.g@mzuni.ac.mw](mailto:Chipeta.g@mzuni.ac.mw)  
Cell: 0882851420

## Appendix 3: Clearance Letter from M'mbelwa District Council

Tel. No. : +265 (1) 342 255/ 01 9 91 012  
Fax : +265 (1) 342 274  
E-mail : [dcmzimbay@globemw.net](mailto:dcmzimbay@globemw.net)  
All communications should be addressed to:  
The District Commissioner



M'MBELWA DISTRICT COUNCIL  
P.O BOX 132,  
MZIMBA  
MALAWI

REF. NO: MDC/ADM/R/2023/001

27<sup>th</sup> February, 2023

**MR. RHODRICK PADONI**  
MZUZU UNIVERSITY  
PRIVATE BAG 201  
LUWINGA  
MZUZU 2

Dear Sir,

**RE: REQUEST FOR CLEARANCE TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH  
ON RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AT M'MBELWA  
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Reference is made to the letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2023 in which you requested for permission from the District Commissioner to conduct research on **Records Management Practices at M'mbelwa District Council**.

The District Commissioner has granted you permission and you are requested to conduct research as stipulated in your letter.

Yours faithfully,

L. Moyo

For: **THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONER**



## Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC)

#### Informed Consent Form for Research in Master of Library and Information Science

##### Introduction

I am Rhodrick Padoni from Mzuzu University. I am doing research on “Records management practices at M’mbelwa District Council in the Northern Region of Malawi.” This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them of me or of another researcher.

##### Purpose of the research

This research aims to investigate records management practices at M’mbelwa District Council in the Northern Region of Malawi.

##### Type of research intervention

This research will involve your participation in filling the questionnaire/responding to the interview questions.

##### Participant selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because your capacity as a district council employee and your views will help the district council get feedback regarding the records management practices available.

##### Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question and move on to the next question.

##### Duration

The research takes place for a period of two months. It will take you not more than 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire/15 minutes to respond to the interview questions.

##### Risks

You do not have to answer any question if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable.

##### Reimbursements

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research.

##### Sharing the results

The knowledge that we get from this research will be shared in the Mzuzu University Library and M'mbelwa District Council. Following, we will publish the results so that other interested people may learn from the research.

**Who to contact**

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact: Associate Professor, Dr. George Chipeta on [gchipeta5@gmail.com](mailto:gchipeta5@gmail.com)

This study's proposal has been reviewed and approved by Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) which is a committee whose task is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find more about the Committee, contact Mr. Gift Mbwele, Mzuzu University Research Ethics (MZUNIREC) Administrator, Mzuzu University, P/Bag 201, Luwingu, Mzuzu 2, Phone: 0999404008/0888641486.

**Do you have any questions?**

**Part II: Certificate of Consent**

*I have been invited to participate in research about "Records management practices at M'mbelwa District Council in the Northern Region of Malawi."*

**I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.**

**Print Name of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day/month/year**

**Statement by the researcher**

**I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands the research project. I confirm the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.**

**Signature of Researcher** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_ **Day/month/year**

## Appendix 5: Questionnaire for Top Management Staff

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DISTRICT COUNCIL'S TOP MANAGEMENT STAFF

#### Instructions

- (i) Show your choice of answer with a tick (✓).
- (ii) If more than one option applies, tick all the applicable options.

#### SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- (i) Indicate your gender

Male

Female

- (ii) Indicate your work experience

Below 5 years

5-10 years

11-20 years

21-30 years

31-40 years

Above 40 years

- (iii) Indicate your highest educational qualification:

Malawi School Certificate of Education

Diploma

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctoral degree

Others, please specify.....

#### SECTION B: EXISTING RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

##### Records creation and capture (please tick the most appropriate options)

- I. In discharging your duties and responsibilities what records do you create or receive in your department?

- |                                                    |                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Payrolls                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Leave applications      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Government regulations    | <input type="checkbox"/> Appointment letters     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inventory controls        | <input type="checkbox"/> Operations records      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fax                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Instructions            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emails                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Receipts                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reports                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Invoices                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase and sales orders | <input type="checkbox"/> Minutes                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bank checks               | <input type="checkbox"/> Staff appraisal         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contract documents        | <input type="checkbox"/> Tax returns             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attendance reports        | <input type="checkbox"/> Requisitions            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Policy manuals            | <input type="checkbox"/> Memoranda               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Government circulars      | <input type="checkbox"/> Assets registers        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial records         | <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Correspondences           | .....                                            |
|                                                    | .....                                            |

II. What are the formats for the records created at your department/office?

- Paper records only
- Electronic records only
- Both paper and electronic records



III. Which of the following do you use to capture the records created at your department/office?

- Notebooks without carbon copy
- Notebooks with carbon copy
- Official receipt books
- Personal cell phones
- Personal computers
- Office computers
- Electronic Records Management System
- Others (please specify) .....

**Records storage and maintenance**

IV. Which of the following do you use for the storage of paper records at the Council?

- Office drawers
- Office files
- Office folders
- Office boxes
- Office shelves
- Office open cupboards
- Office metallic filing cabinets
- Office tables
- Office floor
- Office corridors
- Registry office
- Others (please specify) .....

V. Which of the following do you use for the storage of electronic records at the council?

- My office computers
- Personal computers
- Flash drives
- CDROMs.
- In the Cloud
- Registry office computers
- Electronic Records Management System
- Electronic records backup system
- IT office computers
- Others (please specify) .....

VI. Where do you keep paper records generated in your office?

- My office
- Council store room

- Registry office
- Others (please specify) .....

**Records retention and disposal**

- VII. Are there records retention and disposition schedules for the M'mbelwa District Council?
  - Yes
  - No

**SECTION C: POLICY FRAMEWORK GOVERNING RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

- VIII. Is there any policy regulating records management at M'mbelwa District Council? Explain your answer.
  - No .....
  - Yes .....
- IX. Does the district council have records management plans? Explain your answer.
  - No .....
  - Yes (If yes what records management plans are available?) .....

**SECTION D: BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT ON SERVICE DELIVERY**

- X. Are M'mbelwa District Council records used to provide information related to identifying service-oriented solutions to improve Council's service delivery?
  - No
  - Yes
- XI. If yes, to question (XII) above, how do council records help officials to achieve effective and efficient public service delivery?
  - Records form the basis for the formulation of policies
  - Records form the basis for the formulation future plans
  - Records form the basis for making informed decisions
  - Consultation with records available is crucial in good service delivery
  - Council cannot function well without records
  - Unavailability of records results in delays in dealing with stakeholders' queries
  - Inaccessibility of records pressures officials to make uninformed decisions regarding service delivery.
  - Records cannot ultimately enhance and solve challenges of service delivery

**SECTION E: FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT**



- XII. Do you have knowledge in records management practices?  
 No  
 Yes
- XIII. If you responded (yes) to question (XIV) above, explain how you attained the records management knowledge?  
 Introductory sessions trainings  
 Workshop-based training  
 In-depth training  
 One-on-one training  
 On the job training  
 Others (please specify) .....
- XIV. What ICT infrastructure are available in managing records at the council?  
 Office computers  
 Personal computers  
 CDROMs  
 Cloud computing  
 Electronic Records Management System  
 Electronic records backup system  
 Scanning gadgets  
 Internet connectivity  
 Printers  
 Others (please specify) .....
- XV. Does top management support records management in the following:  
1. Provision of specific budget lines for records management activities;  Yes  No  
2. Effective endorsement of records management projects;  Yes  No  
3. Funding of specialist records keeping training;  Yes  No  
4. Approval of formal policies for records keeping;  Yes  No

**Thank you for your time!**

## Appendix 6: Questionnaire for Middle Management Staff

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MIDDLE MANAGEMENT STAFF

#### Instructions

- (i) Show your choice of answer with a tick (✓).
- (ii) If more than one option applies, tick all the applicable options.

#### SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- (i) Indicate your gender

Male

Female

- (ii) Indicate your work experience.

Below 5 years

5-10 years

11-20 years

21-30 years

31-40 years

Above 40 years

- (iii) Indicate your highest educational qualification:

Malawi School Certificate of Education

Diploma

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctoral degree

Others, please specify.....

#### SECTION B: EXISTING RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

##### Records creation and capture (please tick the most appropriate options)

- I. In discharging your duties and responsibilities what records do you create or receive in your department?

Payrolls

Inventory controls

Government regulations

Fax

- |                                                    |                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emails                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Instructions            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reports                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Receipts                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase and sales orders | <input type="checkbox"/> Invoices                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bank checks               | <input type="checkbox"/> Minutes                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contract documents        | <input type="checkbox"/> Tax returns             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attendance reports        | <input type="checkbox"/> Requisitions            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Policy manuals            | <input type="checkbox"/> Memoranda               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Government circulars      | <input type="checkbox"/> Assets registers        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial records         | <input type="checkbox"/> Staff appraisal         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Correspondences           | <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leave applications        | .....                                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appointment letters       | .....                                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Operations records        | .....                                            |

II. What are the formats for the records created at your department/office?

- Paper records only
- Electronic records only
- Both paper and electronic records

- III. Which of the following do you use to capture the records created at your department/office?
- Notebooks without carbon copy
  - Notebooks with carbon copy
  - Official receipt books
  - Personal cell phones
  - Personal computers
  - Office computers
  - Electronic Records Management System
  - Others (please specify) .....

**Records storage and maintenance**

- IV. Which of the following do you use for the storage of paper records at the Council?
- Office drawers
  - Office files
  - Office folders
  - Office boxes
  - Office shelves
  - Office open cupboards
  - Office metallic filing cabinets
  - Office tables
  - Office floor
  - Office corridors
  - Registry office
  - Others (please specify) .....
- V. Which of the following do you use for the storage of electronic records at the council?
- My office computers
  - Personal computers
  - Flash drives
  - CDROMs
  - In the Cloud
  - Registry office computers
  - Electronic Records Management System
  - Electronic records backup system
  - IT office computers
  - Others (please specify) .....

- VI. Where do you keep paper records generated in your office?  
 My office  
 Council store room  
 Registry office  
 Others (please specify) .....

**Records retention and disposal**

- VII. Are there records retention and disposition schedules for M'mbelwa District Council?  
 Yes  
 No

**SECTIONN C: BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT ON SERVICE DELIVERY**

Are M'mbelwa District Council records used to provide information related to identifying service-oriented solutions to improve Council's service delivery?

- No  
 Yes
- VIII. If yes, to question (X) above, how do Council records help officials to achieve effective and efficient public service delivery?  
 Records form the basis for the formulation of policies  
 Records form the basis for the formulation future plans  
 Records form the basis for making informed decisions  
 Consultation with records available is crucial in good service delivery  
 Council cannot function well without records  
 Unavailability of records results in delays in dealing with stakeholders' queries  
 Inaccessibility of records pressures officials to make uninformed decisions regarding service delivery.  
 Records cannot ultimately enhance and solve challenges of service delivery

**SECTION D: FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

- IX. Do you have knowledge in records management practices?  
 No  
 Yes
- X. If yes in (XII) above, how did you attain the records management knowledge?  
 Introductory sessions trainings  
 Workshop-based training  
 In-depth training  
 One-on-one training

- On the job training
- Others (please specify) .....

XI. What ICT infrastructure are available for managing records at the council?

- Office computers
- Personal computers
- CDROMs
- Cloud computing
- Electronic Records Management System
- Electronic records backup system
- Scanning gadgets
- Internet connectivity
- Printers
- Others (please specify) .....

XII. Does top management support records management in the following:

1. Provision of specific budget lines for records management activities;  Yes  No
2. Effective endorsement of records management projects;  Yes  No
3. Funding of specialist records keeping training;  Yes  No
4. Approval of formal policies for records keeping;  Yes  No

**Thank you for your time!**

## Appendix 7: Questionnaire for Clerical Level Staff

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CLERICAL LEVEL STAFF

#### Instructions

- (i) Show your choice of answer with a tick (✓).
- (ii) If more than one option applies, tick all the applicable options.

#### SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- (i) Indicate your gender

Male  
 Female

- (ii) Indicate your work experience

Below 5 years  
 5-10 years  
 11-20 years  
 21-30 years  
 31-40 years  
 Above 40 years

- (iii) Indicate your highest educational qualification

Junior Certificate of Education  
 Malawi School Certificate of Education  
 Diploma  
 Bachelor's degree  
 Master's degree  
 Doctoral degree  
 Others, please specify.....

#### SECTION B: EXISTING RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

##### Records creation and capture (please tick the most appropriate options)

- I. In discharging your duties and responsibilities what records do you create or receive in your department?
  - Payrolls
  - Inventory controls
  - Government regulations
  - Fax

- |                                                    |                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emails                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Instructions            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reports                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Receipts                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase and sales orders | <input type="checkbox"/> Invoices                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bank checks               | <input type="checkbox"/> Minutes                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contract documents        | <input type="checkbox"/> Tax returns             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attendance reports        | <input type="checkbox"/> Requisitions            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Policy manuals            | <input type="checkbox"/> Memoranda               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Government circulars      | <input type="checkbox"/> Assets registers        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial records         | <input type="checkbox"/> Staff appraisal         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Correspondences           | <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leave applications        | .....                                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appointment letters       | .....                                            |

Operations records

II. What are the formats for the records created at your department/office?

- Paper records only
- Electronic records only
- Both paper and electronic records



- III. Which of the following do you use to capture the records created at your department/office?
- Notebooks without carbon copy
  - Notebooks with carbon copy
  - Official receipt books
  - Personal cell phones
  - Personal computers
  - Office computers
  - Electronic Records Management System
  - Others (please specify) .....

**Records storage and maintenance**

- IV. Which of the following do you use for the storage of paper records at the Council?
- Office drawers
  - Office files
  - Office folders
  - Office boxes
  - Office shelves
  - Office open cupboards
  - Office metallic filing cabinets
  - Office tables
  - Office floor
  - Office corridors
  - Registry office
  - Others (please specify) .....
- V. Which of the following do you use for the storage of electronic records at the council?
- My office computers
  - Personal computers
  - Flash drives
  - CDRoms
  - In the Cloud
  - Registry office computers
  - Electronic Records Management System
  - Electronic records backup system
  - IT office computers
  - Others (please specify) .....
- VI. Where do you keep paper records generated in your office?
- My office

- Council store room
- Registry office
- Others (please specify) .....

**Records retention and disposal**

- VII. Are there records retention and disposition schedules for the district council?
- Yes
  - No

**SECTION C: FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

- VIII. Do you have knowledge in records management practices?
- No
  - Yes
- IX. If yes in (X) above, how did you attain the records management knowledge?
- Introductory sessions trainings
  - Workshop-based training
  - In-depth training
  - One-on-one training
  - On the job training
  - Others (please specify) .....
- X. What ICT infrastructure are available for managing records at the council?
- Office computers
  - Personal computers
  - CDRoms
  - Cloud computing
  - Electronic Records Management System
  - Electronic records backup system
  - Scanning gadgets
  - Internet connectivity
  - Printers
  - Others (please specify) .....
- XI. Does top management support records management in the following:
1. Provision of specific budget lines for records management activities;  Yes  No
  2. Effective endorsement of records management projects;  Yes  No
  3. Funding of specialist records keeping training;  Yes  No
  4. Approval of formal policies for records keeping;  Yes  No

**Thank you for your time!**

## Appendix 8: Interview Guide for Registry Officer

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR REGISTRY OFFICER

#### SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- i. Gender: [ ] Male [ ] Female
- ii. What is your work experience?  
.....
- iii. What is your highest academic qualification?  
.....

#### SECTION B: EXISTING RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

##### Records storage and maintenance

- I. How is temperature and relative humidity in records storage rooms controlled?  
.....

##### Records access and security

- II. Who accesses records and what tools do you use in searching and retrieval of the records?  
.....
- III. What procedures should one follow to access Council records?  
.....
- IV. Do you have a tracking system for those records which have been issued out?  
Explain your answer  
.....
- V. What measures are in place to ensure the security of district council records against the following?
  - a. Unauthorised access  
.....
  - b. Unauthorised alterations  
.....
  - c. Accidental loss or destruction  
.....
  - d. Deterioration  
.....
  - e. During disaster  
.....
- VI. Are there records retention and disposition schedules for the district council?  
.....
- VII. For how long are paper or electronic records retained at the council?  
.....
- VIII. What criteria do you use to dispose of paper records?  
.....

**SECTION C: POLICY FRAMEWORK GOVERNING RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

- IX. Does M'mbelwa District Council have policy, plans and guideline for managing records? Explain your answer.  
.....

**SECTION D: BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT ON SERVICE DELIVERY**

Do M'mbelwa District Council officials consult records when they are formulating council policies and plans? If yes what these policies and plans?  
.....

**SECTION E: FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

- X. What skills do you have to assist you managing the Council records?  
.....
- XI. How did you attain the skills mentioned in (X) above?  
.....
- XII. Do you have any qualification in records management?  
.....
- XIII. How many registry employees have records management qualifications?  
.....
- XIV. What infrastructure is available for managing records at the Council?  
.....
- XV. How does top management support records management at the council?  
.....
- XVI. Are you satisfied with the amount of funds that the council allocate to records management activities? Explain your answer.  
.....  
.....

**Thank you for your time!**

# Appendix 9: Interview Guide for Management Information Systems Officer

## INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS OFFICER (MISO)

### SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- i. Gender: [ ] Male [ ] Female
- ii. What is your work experience?  
.....
- iii. What is your highest academic qualification?  
.....

### SECTION B: EXISTING RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

#### Records storage and maintenance

- I. How is temperature and relative humidity in records storage rooms controlled?  
.....

#### Records access and security

- II. Who access records and what ICT tools are available for records access controls or restrictions? Explain your answer  
.....
- III. What ICT tools are used in searching and retrieval of the records?  
.....
- IV. Do you have any automated tracking system used for tracking records which have been issued out? Explain your answer.....
- V. What measures are in place to ensure the security of district council records against the following?
  - a. Unauthorised access  
.....
  - b. Unauthorised alterations  
.....
  - c. Accidental loss or destruction  
.....
  - d. Deterioration  
.....
  - e. During disaster  
.....
- VI. Are there records retention and disposition schedules for the district council?  
.....
- VII. For how long are paper or electronic records retained at the council?  
.....
- VIII. What criteria do you use to dispose of paper records?  
.....

**SECTION C: POLICY FRAMEWORK GOVERNING RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

- IX. What policies and guidelines in your district council support the use of ICTs?  
.....  
.....
- X. Do these policies and guidelines deal with records management issues?  
.....
- XI. Which standards or guidelines (something used as a measure) are used in managing digital records? .....

**SECTION D: BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT ON SERVICE DELIVERY**

Do M’mbelwa District Council officials consult records when they are formulating Council policies and plans? If yes what these policies and plans?

.....  
.....

**SECTION E: FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

- XII. What skills do you have to assist you managing the Council records?  
.....
- XIII. How did you attain the skills mentioned in (XIII) above?  
.....
- XIV. Do you have any qualification in records management?  
.....
- XV. What infrastructure does the Council have to support records management?  
.....  
.....
- XVI. How does top management support records management at the Council?  
.....  
.....
- XVII. Are you satisfied with the amount of funds that the council allocate towards ICT infrastructure for improving records management activities? Explain your answer.  
.....  
.....

**Thank you for your time!**

## Appendix 10: Observation Guide

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### OBSERVATION GUIDE ON THE MANAGEMENT OF DISTRICT COUNCIL RECORDS

#### SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- i. Observer .....
- ii. Dates of observation .....

#### SECTION B: RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- I. House-keeping practices for records storage places .....
- II. Storage facilities and equipment .....
- III. Quality and adequacy of the storage facilities .....
- IV. Temperature and humidity control equipment .....
- V. General security of records .....
- VI. Tools available for records control .....

#### SECTION C: FACTORS AFFECTING SMOOTH MANAGEMENT OF RECORDS

- VII. Availability of infrastructure for managing records .....

**End of observation tool**

## Appendix 11: Documents Review Guide

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### DOCUMENTS REVIEW GUIDE

#### Section A: Reviewing documents

The researcher sought to review the following documents in soliciting data to answer research questions as well as to add to findings obtained through questionnaires, interviews and personal observation:

- I. National Archives Act .....
- II. Public Sector Digital Records Management Framework .....
- III. ICT Policy .....
- IV. Data Management Policy .....
- V. Public Finance Management Policy .....
- VI. Disposal of Assets Policy .....
- VII. New records survey worksheet .....
- VIII. Old records survey worksheet .....
- IX. Draft records management policies, plans and guidelines .....
- X. Documents on staff training in records management .....
- XI. Records management policy .....
- XII. Records retention and disposition schedules .....
- XIII. Registry manual .....
- XIV. Announcements on records management related issues on notice boards.....
- XV. Records disposal procedure document .....

End of document review guide