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Challenges for Information Professionals in Government Agency

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to look at the challenges faced by information professionals in Malaysia context, which focus on a government agency. The career as an information professional is seen invisible, although the importance of information management is undeniable. Every year the number of graduates grows gradually, but still many of the graduates did not get a job in the field of study. In the meantime, the Malaysian Government is committed to implementing the Electronic Government (EG) in line with technological advancement. The implementation of EG indirectly affects the work process of information management, which indirectly poses a significant challenge to information professionals. The need for information professionals exists but environmental factors should be considered.

Keywords: Library and Information Management, Information Professionals, Profession, Electronic Government, Digital Era

Introduction

Information today becomes a crucial asset to the organization either in government or private sector. Moreover, the digital technology has become the important key in increasing the level of innovation, competitive and growth in organization (Harib, Sarijan and Hussin, 2017). Therefore it should be managed effectively and efficiently by the professionals as the importance of information management is undeniable. According to Rahayu (2015) explains that information professionals are individuals who use information strategically in their work to help their organizations meet vital goals. Information professionals accomplish this through various means including gathering, developing, deploying and managing information resources and services. Information professionals harness a variety of existing and emerging information tools to accomplish goals. Information professionals include records managers, archivists, chief information officers, information analysts, taxonomists, web developers, information brokers and consultants. According to Kumar et al, (2013), information professional also required to meet the requirement on internet management and analyze good information.

Every year the number of information professionals in Malaysia is increasing as many university students graduated in the information management field. Universiti Teknologi

MARA (UiTM) is one of the local university that produced information professionals from Faculty of Information Management. Based on the syllabus introduced by the university, they are a qualified and competent person with a satisfactory level of knowledge and skills that enable to act effectively in implementing their roles and responsibilities as information professionals in an organization. In terms of job opportunity, the profession as an information professional is still invisible, and people aware of the profession is still low.

The rapid pace of technological advancement strongly influenced the work process that brought change from traditional methods to digitization. The information management technology serves to make information available to plan, control and manage in appropriate information technology infrastructure (Nor Ahmad Khamzah, Sarah Md. Sah and Norhayati Hussin, 2017). The implementation of Electronic Government is a big challenge as it needs a tremendous difference in the existing work process. The transformation is a new challenge to the profession as information professionals. This paper will look at the challenges faced by "information professionals" at a government agency in Malaysia in term of career and environmental effect, which is technological advancement.

Information Professional as a Career

Information Professional plays essential roles in the organization. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, roles is a position or purpose that someone or something has in a situation and organization, society and relationship. Roles are responsibilities of the person in family, organization and community. Therefore, professional roles mean people who are trained and specialized in the specific job and task. The term information professional itself is preferable to the term of information manager because it brings a more significant meaning describing professionals elaborate in all segments of the information transfer chain from generation to use (Yatin *et al.*, 2018). They are experts in managing records that are valuable to the organization.

In Malaysia government agencies, the existence of information professionals is not new. The profession as the archivist, for example, has been around for over 60 years since 1957 align with the existence of the National Archives of Malaysia. Although the profession as an information professional is recognized as an important profession, however, the awareness of the people about the profession remains low. Various visitor come to libraries, museum and archives in expecting the limited access to resources however, little know the information professional is service provider, compiling, organizing and delivering the information to them (Marty, 2012). This is quite sad because the information professional provide the expensive result to the end user especially archivist that provide valuable information to the society.

Study on the existence of records professionals and their role in Malaysian organizations revealed that there are no "real" records professional in Malaysian organizations. The responsibility and accountability of documenting and managing the organizations' records are dispersed and decentralized. Records manager as a profession is not established within the Malaysian organization structures. Generally, there is no specific position of "records manager" in Malaysia organizations. However, the "archivists" are confined at the National Archives of Malaysia (Ismail and Jamaludin, 2009).

In term of job opportunity, the Public Service Department does not establish specific positions under the category of information professional except for the jobs of curators, archivists and librarians. Referring to the official portal of the Malaysian Public Service Commission, there is no position of records officer except those three (3) positions even though records officer is vital to an organization especially in the digital era where information is the main focus. While, in the private agency the scope and responsibility is referring the information professional job however the position is not refer as records manager. The administration officer and document controller position is one of profession that deal with document and records in the private organization.

According to Jamaludin *et al.* (2006), the position of Records Manager does not exist in the public sector, meaning to say at present the job scheme for record managers in the public sector is still non-existence. Graduates trained in record management at this time yet could not be employed as record managers in the public sector. Presently, the public sector of Malaysia is without record managers to manage the records that are generated daily. This situation should not happen because, with the introduction of electronic government within the Multi-Media Super Corridor setup, indeed electronic record management is deemed one of the most crucial factors in ensuring the success of the electronic government initiative. The record management program introduced by the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM should be able to fill the void of records management professionals in the country.

At present in government agencies record management task is handed out to anyone without the need for professional qualifications in information management specifically in records management. According to a circular produced by the Public Service Department namely Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Bilangan 5 Tahun 2007: Panduan Pengurusan Pejabat, the head of department is required to appoint a department record officer regardless of background in information management.

Although the profession as information professionals specifically records manager considered as professional, but it is not established unlike other well-known professionals such as doctors, accountants and architects. Generally, the profession as records officer does not receive proper attention in this country. It is because the position as records officer often receive low priority due to misconception. A part from that, the position as records officer does not return benefits in the form of material gains in the near future. In fact, the career as records officer faces challenge in career development and recognition by the department.

Role of Information Professionals in Digital Era

Times are moving fast and the rise of the digital age has brought a change in information management in the government sector. The emergence of digital era gives big impact and big challenge to the way the government manage the information. While we are in the digital era, the roles play by information professionals becomes bigger as the rapid changes in new technologies have increased the demand for government performance as a whole, especially in information gathering process in the government sector. The role of information professional plays significantly in help the organization in balance the challenges on keeping information secure and compliants with the growing demands on analyse and extract the information for potential business competitive and opportunities (Rosi, 2016; Gavra &

Peristeropoulou, 2013). Not only business environment, government agency also need to adapt and adopt on the current technology in digital age.

Nowadays, government information exist in many forms. It can be in printed (books, periodicals, magazines, reports, papers, technical reports, legal resources, maps, posters, kits and pamphlets, brochures, minutes meeting), non-printed (video recording, film, CD- ROMs, DVD-ROMs, DVDs, audio and video cassettes), electronic media and digital resources (eBooks and other online collections) (Rosliy and Hussin, 2018). This is another challenge that informational professional need to face when government start to implement electronic government (EG).

The implementation of EG by Malaysia government was started since Malaysia awarded Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). One of the project that has been launched is Electronic Record Management (ERM) Electronic records differ from paper records. When the government decided to implement ERM at government agency, the challenging part is the availability of qualified personnel to manage the electronic records systematically. According to Yusof (2011) electronic records management is revolving around two areas. One, about converting documents from paper to electronic format by mean of scanning. Scanning can take two forms i.e. simply scanning the document to obtain an image of it, and scanning the document and then encoding it in electronic from using optical character recognition. Another area of electronic record management is handling digital document and e-mail. The medium to store and capture data are increasingly varies from Microfilm to magnetic (diskette, cartridge, tape, cassette, digital audio tape and) optical media (CD- ROM, digital versatile disk, write once read many and erasable optical disk). The format of medium of storage can be in the form of high density floppy disks, removable hard disk and credit card memory. Therefore, the records managers as part of information professionals who are task to manage the electronic records should update the knowledge and skills and become expert in order to stay relevant.

In line with implementation of EG, library also another area in information management field that affected. According to Bakar (2013) the evolution of library and librarianship development in Malaysia has been significant over the past 100 years. Libraries and librarians in Malaysia have to transform in order to stay relevant in this era of globalization. Librarians need to change their mindset and play an important role in achieving the nation's vision for the future and contribute to the development of a knowledge based society. Librarian as part of information professional which one of the role as librarian is to educate people on how to find information by using technology.

Besides that, according to Hashim and Wan Mokhtar (2012) information professionals within libraries are playing an increasing role in dealing with information in electronic formats by creating Web pages to promote their services to external customers and choosing automated library management systems. Skills in information organization are more necessary in this age of information explosion. Librarians and information professionals have a key role to play in this era. For example, librarians are well equipped to take intranet projects through the various stages of design and maintenance as they understand their users and their organizations information needs and have the range of skills to manage knowledge effectively. The skill in technological project is important among librarians in continue to improve the

library services by focusing the facilitation on information transfer and information literacy (Okonedo, Azubuike, & Adeyoyin, 2013).

Another challenges to the information professional is the shift from traditional library to digital library. According Wan Dolah Wan Kadir (2010) the drift from traditional library to digital library architecture has set drastic changes in favour of adopting knowledge-gain mechanisms via the use of networked and digital environments. With diversity of functions, academic digital library is seen the most waiting proxy in changing the information culture among academic users. One major impact of electronic services is the growing need for user instruction. The trend in education towards distance learning and web-based learning is providing new challenges for information professionals as service providers. This has required the librarian to provide access to quality and valid information to support it by online instruction. Many librarians report an increase in their workloads as more and different resources are added with no increase in professional staff. As a result, in many universities paraprofessional staff and student assistants are providing more reference service, particularly basic assistance in using electronic sources. Librarians are moving more towards specialized research and instructional services. With such transformation in information society of academic users, the existence of digital library may be seen as a drive to a significant path in knowledge-gain spectrum.

As the government aware about the need to have information professional at government agency, the Secretary-General's letter dated March 22, 2000: Nomination of Chief Public Sector Information Officer states that "Public Sector agencies need to name a Chief Information Officer (CIO) among top management". The letter shows the government commitment towards good information management. According to Rosliy and Hussin (2018) the existence of Government Chief Information Officer (GCIO) at MAMPU prove the Government's commitment to ensure the successfulness of coordination and the integration of all development projects regarding ICT and knowledge and information management in the public sector align with the implementation of EG. GCIO and information professional have an important role to act as change agents through the alignment of the public sector strategic plan align with the national development plan. A part from that, information professional in any agency in the government especially librarian, information system have showed that there are plays a big role in managing government information as a whole. Regarding the function of government information and the role of GCIO and information professional in particular, it is important for information professional to ensure information produced by government is worth saving and organized.

Conclusion

Information is considered as valuable asset to an organization. The right information helps an organization to take the right decisions or lead to better decisions that determine the direction of an organization not only in the short term but also in the long run. Thus the information needs to be systematically organized and managed by information professionals who are qualified to manage information received and produced by an organizations accurately, securely and effectively. According to the current situation, the government are suggested to review the organizational structure at public agency. The role of information professional as a professional who qualified to manage valuable information at all public agency need to be

emphasized. For information professional, they should grab all the benefit offer by the technological advancement. It is importance for them to stay relevant in the industry.

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