

Policies, Standards, and Guidelines for Managing E-HRM Records in the Public Sector: Evidence from the RAS Office in Tabora

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Abstract

Human resource (HR) records in public institutions are governed by regulatory frameworks, but implementation is uneven, particularly in decentralised settings. This study examined the impact of policies, standards and guidelines on electronic human resource management (E-HRM) records at the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) Office in Tabora, Tanzania. The study used a case study design. 77 respondents were purposefully selected from a population of 170. A mixed-methods approach was used for data collection, including questionnaires, interviews, document review, and observation. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis. Cronbach's alpha was greater than 0.7, indicating good reliability. The results show a high perceived presence of regulatory frameworks (mean = 4.43), indicating high compliance. However, limited capacity, weak enforcement and operational gaps constrain implementation. Decision-making is supported by existing frameworks, but they are not consistently followed, which affects their effectiveness. The study reveals that, for effective management of E-HRM records, regulatory frameworks alone are insufficient; enforcement by institutions and adoption by users are also required. It recommends capacity-building, stronger enforcement, and context-specific guidelines to improve the reliability and security of HR records in Tanzania's public sector.

Keywords: Human Resource Records, Regulatory Frameworks, Public Sector, Records Management, RAS Office, Tanzania, Tabora.

1.0 Introduction

Most public sector organisations are implementing electronic human resource management (E-HRM) systems to enhance the efficiency, accountability, and transparency of human resource management. E-HRM has been globally recognised for improving workflows, increasing data accuracy, and enabling more strategic human resource decision-making

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through standardised electronic records management processes (Strohmeier, 2024). However, in many developing countries, operational and institutional problems hinder the transition from paper-based to electronic records management (Saksono, 2021; Distel & Lindgren, 2019).

Although national e-government programmes in Tanzania are promoting digital transformation (Manase et al., 2024), most public sector organisations still rely on paper-based systems for recordkeeping. Poor ICT infrastructure, staff's lack of technical skills, weak managerial support, and lax enforcement of existing records regulations and standards are recurring barriers identified by several empirical studies (Newa & Mwantimwa, 2019; Payowela, 2024). Records management techniques are governed by statutory frameworks, including the Public Service Act, the Records and Archives Management Act, and associated recommendations. Yet in practice, the use of these techniques often fails. Public institutions dissociate official compliance frameworks from actual recordkeeping procedures. Existing research in Tanzania and Sub-Saharan Africa has primarily focused on systemic constraints, including outdated legislation, limited funding, and a lack of context-specific technical guidelines (Marwa, 2023; Manase et al., 2024). Much of this literature is generic and offers little insight into how these regulatory frameworks operate at the operational level within specific institutions. In particular, there is little empirical evidence on the effects of policies, standards, and guidelines on the management, accessibility, and integrity of E-HRM records in regional administrative offices.

The Regional Administrative Secretary's Office in Tabora is worth considering. This office is where all the government work in the region is done. If the Regional Administrative Secretary's Office lacks a system to manage employee records, it will cause significant problems. The Regional Administrative Secretary's Office should comply with government rules. However, there are some problems in Tabora that make it difficult for the Regional Administrative Secretary's Office to carry out its work. There are no digital systems at the Regional Administrative Secretary's Office, and power cuts are frequent. The workers of the Regional Administrative Secretary's Office also do not know much about computers.

There are many problems. Doing simple things, such as promoting somebody or moving somebody to a different job, takes time. The Regional Administrative Secretary's Office is also unable to maintain employee records. Sometimes they get changed when they shouldn't. The Regional Administrative Secretary's Office also keeps all employees' files. "This is a lot of problems for the Regional Administrative Secretary's Office. The Regional Administrative Secretary's Office can't fulfil its role, which affects the entire Tabora region. We need to know what is happening in the Regional Administrative Secretary's Office so that we can see how to make the rules work in places like Tabora.

More specifically, it investigates: the extent to which regulatory frameworks support the security, accessibility, and reliability of HR records; the effectiveness of their implementation in improving record-management practices; and the challenges that impede compliance in the institutional context. The study, through a localised case study, provides empirical evidence to bridge the gap between regulatory intent and operational reality in Tanzania's public sector.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Institutional Theory, as propounded by DiMaggio and Powell in 1983, to examine the influence of rules and laws on public records management. This theory holds that organisations are more influenced by pressures to make sense than by their structure alone. Coercive Isomorphism: This is when organisations are compelled to change due to external pressures, such as laws and government regulations. Government notices and national legislation on public records management have pressured offices to use electronic records management systems.

Decoupling and Symbolic Compliance are important concepts in Institutional Theory for this study. This is when an organisation says it is doing something because it looks good. It is not really doing it in its daily work. This way of thinking is important for understanding why a government office might say it's following rules for electronic records management but is not actually doing so because it lacks the ability or resources to do so. The idea of decoupling helps us to understand what is really going on with public records management and why organisations might say one thing and do another. Institutional Theory helps us understand the gap between what organisations say they do and what they actually do, particularly in public records management.

2.2 Regulatory Frameworks and E-HRM Records Management

Clear regulatory frameworks comprising rules, norms and standards are crucial to the administration of e-HRM records. These frameworks generate coercive institutional pressure that shapes record lifecycle processes, such as creation, classification, storage, access, retention, and disposal, to improve consistency, accountability, and legal compliance (Salome et al., 2021; Masanja & Lwoga, 2020; Joshua, 2024). In Tanzania, studies have demonstrated that when such systems are well developed and embedded in day-to-day activities, they provide a solid foundation for systematic decision-making and increased administrative efficiency (Newa & Mwantimwa, 2019; Manase et al., 2024).

However, the existence of regulatory frameworks does not guarantee their effective implementation by institutions. The empirical literature suggests a disconnect between policy and practice. Public agencies may have adequate policies that are not enforced or are poorly understood at the operational level. For example, Leon (2022) reported that personnel awareness of legal responsibilities for records management remains critically low. This has led to inconsistent practices despite the presence of guiding legislation. This empirical reality reinforces the institutional assumption that regulatory regimes without trained personnel and environmental support can serve only as symbolic compliance tools, rather than practical, enforced mechanisms for managing electronic records.

2.3 Implementation Challenges in E-HRM Systems

Institutional, technological and human constraints limit the adoption and use of E-HRM systems in Tanzania and Sub-Saharan Africa. The challenges include poor ICT infrastructure, unreliable internet access, limited financial resources, and low technical skills among staff (Payowela, 2024; Marwa, 2023). These restrictions directly affect institutions' ability to apply norms and standards in a digital context.

Moreover, implementation methods are inadequate, and managerial commitment is limited; both factors undermine compliance with current regulations. However, Mollel & Rutenge (2024) note that, despite policies supporting the adoption of electronic record management systems, organisational lethargy and reluctance to change may hinder their adoption. This indicates that the implementation challenges are not only technical but also organisational, involving principles and governance structures.

2.4 Role of Standards and Operational Guidelines

Policies are implemented through standards and technical recommendations. This includes metadata formats, file naming conventions, access controls, and retention schedules, which are critical to ensuring interoperability, data quality, and system reliability (International Organisation for Standardisation, 2016). There is evidence that institutions with clear operational guidelines are more likely to maintain reliable record-keeping practices and reduce errors associated with manual or ad hoc processes (e-Government Authority, 2021; Kassim, 2019; Mgonja, 2021; Mwilongo, 2022; Mwantima et al., 2020).

However, several studies point to a critical gap: the absence of context-specific guidelines tailored to institutional realities. Generic national frameworks often fail to account for localised operational constraints, leading to inconsistent application across departments and regions. This means organisations can have policies in place and be compliant in name, but fail to achieve effective records management in practice.

2.5 Capacity and Skills in E-HRM Adoption

The staff's ability remains a key factor in the successful implementation of E-HRM. Research consistently shows that the key weaknesses in compliance are poor digital skills, limited training opportunities, and low awareness of regulatory standards (Kyebyala & Rutenge, 2024). Systems may be in place, but staff lack the competence or confidence to use them effectively. This can lead to processes being underutilised or misused.

This points to an important limitation of current practice: policy frameworks often assume a level of technical capacity that does not actually exist. Unless there is systematic training and continuous professional development in accordance with regulatory standards, the gap between policy design and operational implementation is likely to continue.

2.6 Empirical Gaps and Justification for the Study

The available literature on E-HRM and records management in Tanzania is general and lacks empirical evidence on the regulatory framework at the regional administrative level. The studies mainly identify challenges and do not analyse the impact of policies, standards and guidelines on record management practices.

In addition, the interaction between regulatory compliance and user-level E-HRM adoption has been overlooked. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the RAS Office in Tabora, examining the implementation of regulatory frameworks, their impact on E-HRM record management, and the challenges of effective compliance.

3.0 Methodology

This study was conducted at the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) Office in Tabora, Tanzania, to examine the application of records-regulatory frameworks for managing human resource records in the public sector. A mixed-methods approach was used to gain both quantitative and qualitative insights into existing practices, perceptions, and implementation challenges. This approach was considered appropriate since it allows a more comprehensive understanding of both measurable trends and underlying institutional realities.

The target population comprised 170 employees of the RAS Tabora office, including department heads, administrative officers, and support staff from various departments. The RAS Tabora office was chosen because it is the central administrative point overseeing all local government authorities in the region and, therefore, an information-rich site for studying the challenges of E-HRM compliance. The groups were selected for their direct or indirect involvement in managing human resource records. A sample of 77 respondents was selected from the whole population. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula at a 95% confidence level and a 10% margin of error to ensure it was representative of the institution. These 77 respondents were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was used to ensure that only individuals with pertinent knowledge, experience and exposure to recordkeeping processes were included in the study.

Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The questionnaires were distributed to Records Management Assistants (RMAs), secretaries, action officers, and IT personnel to gather diverse perspectives across departments. They collected quantitative data on respondents' perceptions of the existence, clarity, and utilisation of regulations on records. At the same time, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS), human resource officials, records management assistants, and office assistants. Participants were selected for their active involvement in the day-to-day production, use, and maintenance of HR records. Interviews were conducted to better understand practical obstacles, compliance, and the day-to-day realities of maintaining human resource records (both manual and computerised).

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods to summarise response patterns, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The quantitative studies were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Furthermore, a composite scoring (summation) approach was used to determine the total size of major factors related to regulatory frameworks and record management systems. The results were presented in written explanations, tables and diagrams to enhance clarity and facilitate interpretation. Qualitative data collected through interviews were analysed using content analysis. Responses were coded into themes reflecting implementation practices, constraints and institutional dynamics. The NVivo programme was used to facilitate thematic and content analysis of the qualitative data, ensuring systematic coding and retrieval.

The data collection tools were pretested prior to the main study to assess validity and reliability, including clarity, logical flow, and contextual relevance. Adjustments were made

as appropriate, based on the pre-test. The internal consistency of the questionnaire items was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. A coefficient above 0.7 was considered satisfactory for item reliability. Additionally, the use of multiple data sources (questionnaires and interviews) allowed triangulation and increased confidence in the findings.

4.0 Findings and Discussions

4.1 Participant Information

The study was conducted among 77 respondents, representing a sample of the total population of 170 employees at the Tabora Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) office. The participants were department heads, administrative officers, and support staff from various HR and administrative units. Purposive sampling was used to select participants directly involved in human resource management, ensuring a range of perspectives across various organisational levels.

55% of the participants were male and 45% female. In terms of professional experience, 35% had less than five years of service, 40% had between five and ten years, and 25% had more than ten years of experience in public service. The educational qualifications were distributed as 50 per cent diploma holders, 35 per cent bachelor's degree holders, and 15 per cent postgraduate degree holders. The composition ensured a representative cross-section of employees knowledgeable about and involved in the management of HR records.

4.2 Presence of Records Regulatory Frameworks

The study aimed to explore participants' awareness of regulatory frameworks within their organisation. Questionnaire, interview, and observation data indicated that most participants recognised the existence of such frameworks. Table 1 summarises participants' responses on the presence and perception of the record's regulatory frameworks in the organisation:

Table 1: Presence of Records Regulatory Frameworks

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Presence of records regulatory frameworks in the organisation	4.45	0.597
Records legal framework operates as the foundation of HR programmes and activities	4.35	0.532
Records Management Policy 2011 delineates roles and responsibilities for HR records	4.43	0.524

Source: Field Data (2024)

Descriptive analysis shows a high level of awareness of formal rules, with mean scores on a 5.00-point scale ranging from 4.35 to 4.45. The highest score was for the question measuring the general existence of frameworks ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.597$), showing that employees are well aware of the national records requirements. The low standard deviation suggests a high level of agreement between departments and therefore that these frameworks are well established.

Respondents also perceived the connection between legal compliance and HR operations ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.532$) and concurred that the Records Management Policy 2011 explicitly clarified organisational roles ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.524$). The high ratings indicate a high level of formal awareness of regulatory tools. This means that the institution is well aligned with national policy on paper.

4.3 Theoretical Discussion on Presence and the Decoupling Phenomenon

The quantitative results (Table 1) show high awareness scores ($M = 4.45$), but a more in-depth institutional study reveals a more complex operational reality. In the public administration literature, a high score on policy awareness generally indicates formal or symbolic alignment, but not necessarily behavioural conformance in day-to-day work. This divergence is consistent with the basic assumptions of Institutional Theory, i.e. the idea of decoupling (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For example, the e-GA guidelines in Tanzania. Public organisations operating under strong external mandates tend to exhibit high levels of formal conformity to achieve political legitimacy and pass statutory audit ratings.

At the RAS Office in Tabora, formal regulatory knowledge and informal recording methods are clearly separated in practice. Staff can easily cite important regulatory documents, such as the Records Management Policy 2011, but field observations and key informant interviews showed that day-to-day activities often bypass these restrictions. Staff are often forced to rely on unindexed local desktop folders and archaic manual processes due to technical and resource limitations. This disparity implies that good conceptual understanding does not necessarily translate into operational compliance. The formal framework is often a symbolic compliance mechanism to meet external supervision requirements, while the actual operational work largely deviates from digital standards.

Table 2: Contributions of Records Regulatory Frameworks in HR Records Management

Contributions of Regulatory Frameworks	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Facilitates the creation, processing, preservation, and defensibility of HR records	4.40	0.654
Improves the defensibility of records retention and storage decisions	4.49	0.661
Protects HR records from unauthorised access	4.36	0.742
Ensures accessibility and usability for authorised personnel	4.52	0.754
Overall Average	4.43	0.638

Source: Field Data (2024)

Participants described regulatory frameworks for records as facilitating the production, processing, preservation, and defensibility of HR records. Legal and policy frameworks had a mean of 4.40 and a standard deviation of 0.654, underscoring their importance in guiding effective HR record management. HR documents, Management policy, and law were recognised as important for improving the defensibility of document retention and storage decisions, with a mean of 4.49 and a standard deviation of 0.661.

Protection of HR Records: The statement that measured the protection of HR records against unauthorised access had a mean of 4.36 with a standard deviation of 0.742 (Mean = 4.36, SD = 0.742). A high average indicates a solid consensus that the security measures are effective. The standard deviation of 0.742 indicates that individual replies did not stray far from this positive average, suggesting a high degree of consistency in personnel's agreement on data security. Accessibility and Usability: For authorised staff, the mean was higher at 4.52 (SD = 0.754).

This suggests strong security, yet the frameworks do not become bogged down in bureaucracy. Authorised persons get files with an extraordinarily high and uniform degree of convenience. Overall Contribution: The cumulative average for the contribution of records regulatory frameworks was 4.43, with a combined standard deviation of 0.638 (Mean = 4.43, SD = 0.638).

4.4 Empirical Discussion on Lifecycle Contributions

The quantitative results for life cycle management (M = 4.43) align with broader records management publications that call for explicit legislative frameworks to safeguard data integrity in public systems. Clear principles of info-governance, such as those exemplified by the National Archives of Australia (2021) and Upward et al. (2018), ensure that digital documents are not destroyed without authorisation and remain legally valid. Lubale (2020) states that the use of centralised records legislation increases transparency and accountability and reduces data loss in public organisations.

The high mean accessibility score (M = 4.52) at the RAS Office in Tabora contradicts the technical concerns identified in the field. This gap shows that, while employees theoretically understand the efficiency of the regulation requiring internet access, in practice, they are often hindered by infrastructure constraints.

The access channels mentioned in the policies will not be available during frequent power outages or slow network connections in the regional registries, and personnel will resort to manual files. This supports the assertions of Salome et al. (2021) and Masanja and Lwoga (2020) that the practical benefits of policies on digital records cannot be effectively realised without a solid technical infrastructure.

4.5 Qualitative Perspectives from Key Informants

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews provided context to the quantitative measures and highlighted the practical challenges of implementing policy at the regional level. An experienced human resource officer observed the benefits of having planned records retention regulations for administrative planning:

Having human resources records in an orderly manner helps us make better judgements and develop the right policies that improve effectiveness and efficiency in human resources management throughout the regional secretariat (Senior HR Officer, Interview, 12 March 2024).

This attitude demonstrates that management understands the strategic importance of record compliance. Interviews also highlighted critical operational gaps not addressed

by national rules, leaving needs unmet in specific areas. A veteran registry supervisor explained the difficulty of applying previous disposal schedules to current personnel files:

We use the General Retention and Disposal Schedule, 2005, and the Records Management Policy, 2011, to determine how long to retain HR records. Most of the HR documents from the recruitment process are kept for a minimum of one year, but the schedule does not mention retention for the digital Personal Files (PF) and obliges us to set up a special internal policy that we do not have at the moment (Registry Supervisor, Interview, March 15, 2024).

This interview points to an important regulatory gap: existing national timetables for paper records do not always account for contemporary technological structures, such as digital personal files. Consequently, there is a lack of clear guidance in regional offices on digital retention and disposal, leading to ad hoc storage practices that raise security and compliance concerns.

4.6 Triangulated Discussion of the Core Policy Awareness Disconnect

Triangulation of quantitative measures ($M = 4.45$ for the presence of policies) with qualitative data from interviews and field observations reveals an acute mismatch in the communication and implementation of regulations. This trend is very similar to the results of Apleni et al. (2020), who observed that although there are usually detailed digital records policies in central government headquarters, front-line users in regional offices are clueless about how to use them. The same communication gap exists even in the RAS Office in Tabora.

Corporations sign compliance agreements all the time, but the paperwork tends to sit in the executive offices and never reaches the registry workers who do the day-to-day work. There's no local training or obvious handbooks, and staff must interpret broad national rules themselves. The absence of clear norms leads to non-standardised workflows, inconsistent file management and an increased risk of data breaches. Institutions must do more than passively disseminate policy to develop a sustainable culture of compliance. Mautu (2020) argues that formal regulations should be translated into everyday administrative practices, achieved through continuous training and clear operating handbooks in public sector organisations.

5.0 Conclusion

The findings reveal that participants recognise the efficiency of the organisation's records regulatory frameworks. High mean scores and low standard deviations indicate consensus that these frameworks provide a valid legal foundation for HR activities and define management duties regarding HR records. This consensus suggests that the frameworks are well-established, fostering regulatory compliance, accountability and good records management. Moreover, consistent perceptions further strengthen the robustness of the findings and highlight the frameworks' potential to facilitate effective HR management and evidence-based decision-making.

On the other hand, the findings indicate that records management frameworks greatly improve the management of human resource records in organisations. Strongly agree that these frameworks help create, process, and safely store HR records. Access was particularly welcomed by authorised staff. Such frameworks enable accountability, compliance, and information security, and ultimately promote effective organisational operations. In general, record-keeping frameworks are beneficial for the effective management of human resource records.

The results highlight the importance of rules to manage resource records. These criteria are considered helpful for ensuring that human resource records are created, stored, and accessed quickly. Keep human resource records. These standards encourage people to take responsibility for their actions, to observe the law, and to make judgments without sharing private information. So, standards for maintaining resource records are needed. For keeping human resource records in a good, long-lasting way. Maintaining human resource records is very significant. Needs to be done properly.

6.0 Recommendations

Staff Training and Capacity Building

RAS Tabora should establish ongoing training programmes for all staff involved in records management to ensure the effective management of HR records. Such programmes shall include training in electronic records management, including appropriate procedures for filing, retrieval, retention, and disposal. Improving staff skills and awareness of the rules and technological requirements can help the organisation reduce errors, mitigate the risk of data breaches, and improve overall compliance with record-keeping regulatory frameworks.

Technology Integration and Digitisation

Digitising HR records is crucial for improved accessibility, efficiency and security. Following comprehensive feasibility studies and consultations with relevant stakeholders, RAS Tabora should introduce new technologies to digitise its personnel records. These measures ensure that the digital solutions are compatible with current infrastructure, meet staff requirements, and align with national ICT and records management standards.

Operational and Policy Implementation Guidance

High-level policies, such as the Records Management Policy 2011, and appropriate legal frameworks need to be translated into clear operational directions. Such rules should specify retention periods, access controls, standardised procedures, audit methods and secure disposal practices. Clear, context-specific guidance can help ensure consistency in HR records management and strengthen accountability across all departments.

Future Research and Policy Assessment

The present study explained only 38.3% of the variance in HR records management; therefore, future studies are needed to examine other factors that influence effective record-keeping. Future research could assess the impact of new legislation, such as the proposed

Freedom of Access to Information Law, on the management of personnel information and expand the scope to include other regional offices. HR record-keeping procedures in the Tanzanian public sector will be better understood, and evidence to inform national policy reforms will be provided.

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