Records management and Internal Quality Assessment: A case study of higher educational institution in the context of Thailand [*]

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Abstract

The article aims to discuss the relationship between the records management and the internal quality assessment in the Thai higher educational institutions. The study regarding how records have been managed to support the internal quality assessment has shown the limitation of universities in Thailand to understand both the importance of maintaining the evidential value of records and how to capture records for proving their academic quality. The approaches that most of the Thai universities have done for acquiring records; therefore, either creating new records specifically for the internal quality assessment or creating documents to replace losing records. This generates unnecessary works and decreases the accountability of records that the universities used for the internal quality assessment. The implementation of records keeping system; instead, facilitate the universities to be able to capture reliable records usable for the assessment. In addition, keeping records according to the universities' functions has identified the quality the universities have achieved since the study has revealed that the nine elements of academic quality that the internal quality assessment needs are the main functions of the universities. To success in the implementation of records keeping system, the universities are required to (1) establish records management policy and records management unit, (2) design the file plan and records retention schedule to meet the university's functions, (3) enhance records awareness and knowledge among staff, and (4) create, capture, maintain, use, and deposit records to comply with the file plan and records retention schedule.

Keywords: Records, Records management, Records keeping system, Records management unit, File plan, Records retention schedule, Internal quality assessment

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Introduction

Internal quality assessment is likely one of the most significant elements all higher educational institutions in Thailand required to include in their organizational functions since this activity is not only enforced by law, but also represents their educational quality. To meet each criterion set in the assessment, the universities have to provide various records as evidence to prove their quality achievement. It, however, appears not easy to do that when the records keeping system has not been implemented to capture, maintain and access to the records as soon as needed. The article aims to (1) provide examples of difficulty in collecting requiring records (2) discuss the importance of and how to implement the records keeping system to facilitate the quality assessment and (3) suggest the possible methods to manage university records systematically.

The article is divided into three parts. The first part is regarding the showcase of how records required for the assessment have been collected and the problems to consider them as reliable and authentic records qualified to use as evidence of activity. Then, the nature of and how to capture records including the implementation of records keeping system to support the assessment are discussed. Finally, in the third part, the effective measures to manage records ensuring that they are captured, maintained, and accessed properly are suggested.

Examples of problematic approaches to acquire requiring records

Data collecting from interviewing the head of six university archives in Thailand identifies that the records management system including a record management unit has not been implemented formally in any university in Thailand (Poolsatitiwat, 2016). In addition, most university staff ranging from an executive board, academics, to supporting staff have never known what records are and unable to distinguish between documents and records they create, receive, and keep (Poolsatitiwat, 2016). These reflect in the approach most Thai universities use to acquire requiring records for the internal quality assessment. Two problems have been raised and indicated the problematic approach of creating not acquiring records for the internal quality assessment.

Creating new records specifically for the internal quality assessment

According to the manual of internal quality assessment, the universities are required to present the records as evidence to prove their quality regarding (1) policy, (2) teaching, (3) students, (4) research, (5) academic services, (6) preservation of art and culture, (7) administration, (8) finance, and (9) quality control (Office of the Higher Education Commission, OHEC, 2014). The mechanism most universities have been implemented for this requirement is establishing the quality assessment (QA) department to take responsible for collecting records (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). Since the activities regarding these nine elements of academic quality have been taken place or run by many departments and the central records management system has not been implemented, records have been created and kept in various places according to the system that each department set up (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). The approach the QA department done for acquiring records; therefore, does not accessing the requiring records through the university records keeping system but creating new records from the existing documents transferring from other departments (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). For example, when the QA department needs the records regarding the university academic staff's training, typically, these records should be kept or merged all in the same file and should be able to access at least by the human resource department. However, it likely appears that the records are kept by either the creators or the relevant departments and have never been transferred to be kept or merged in the same file. This results in the inability of the human resource department or anyone in the university including the QA department to access all records of university academic staff's training. What the QA department able to do for getting the records is asking all departments to send data regarding what they have done for training their staff and using this data to create the new record regarding the university academic staff's training (Poolsatitiwat, 2018).

Walne (1984), Pearce-Moses (2005), International Council on Archives-Committee on Descriptive Standards (1999), ARMA International (2007), National Archives of Australia (2015, online), and InterPARES 2 (2016, online) defined records *as documents created for a business transaction and kept as evidence of that transaction*. In addition, Shepherd and Yeo (2003) and Williams (2006) discussed that *any document cannot be regarded as a record unless it achieves the elements of being a record which are (1) content, (2) context, (3) structure, (4) complete/integrality, (5) authenticity, (6) reliability, and (7) usability.* These identify that the records used as evidence of the university academic staff's training should be the records created by those who run the activities regarding academic staff training. The QA department should only capture those records to be the evidence. Creating the new record like the QA

department has done so far leads to the difficulty to accept it as a record as this record cannot achieve the elements of being a record in particular the reliability. Reliable records must be created by those who participate in the transaction of activities and only reliable records can be used as evidence of that activities.

Creating new documents replacing losing records

Due to the non-implementation of records keeping system, the universities face not only the inability to access but also the loss of records for proving their achievement on the nine elements of academic quality. For instance, the QA department needs all records regarding the Thai cultural activities run by any departments as these records can provide accurate data for writing the trustworthy report. Since the QA department cannot access records of any departments, the QA department asks all departments to submit their records regarding the Thai cultural activities that have been done in their department (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). However, it likely appears that some departments cannot transfer their records because they lost them. The approach the QA department always does is asking those departments writing the report summarizing what the departments have done on the Thai cultural activities (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). These documents are created from the data the departments collecting from various existing sources such as asking staff, department's minute of meeting, or department's annual report (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). No one can guarantee their accuracy and integrality because these documents were not created during the transaction of activities by those who take responsible for the activities (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). This results in the trustworthiness of replacing losing records with creating documents.

Documents cannot be used as a record unless they achieve the seven elements of being a record. Duranti (2010) explained that the understanding of documentation or document strategy is necessary if documents are regarded as records and used as evidence. This means that since the universities need evidence for proving their academic quality, the universities should understand how to create, capture, and keep their records to maintain the seven elements of being a record. In addition, the university should recognize that records must be kept and access at any time by those who have the right to access. Finally, records must be monitored to ensure that they will not be lost and will be kept safely.

The two problematic approaches of collecting records for the internal quality assessment identify that the universities lack of both the understanding of what records are and how to use them as evidence proving their academic quality. In addition, the approach to create not capture records provides unnecessary work for the departments and increase the

excessive workload among those who are assigned to take responsible for the internal quality assessment.

Creating unnecessary work and increasing workload

Due to the non-establishment of records keeping system to capture all requiring records, most departments have to either collect data or create new documents. This consumes both time and staff. For instance, the research department has to spend at least one week and provide at least one staff for collecting data from all departments to write a report showing the research projects of the university (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). Likewise, some departments that some of their records are loss have to spend at least two weeks to collect relevant data from existing records to create a new document regarding their research projects (Poolsatitiwat, 2018).

The above three examples of the difficulty to acquire records to be evidence for the internal quality assessment can be tackled by the implementation of records keeping system. This system can facilitate the departments in particular the QA department not to create new records or use unreliable documents for the internal quality assessment in three main aspects. First, it can support the QA department to access all university's records relevant to the nine elements of academic quality. This will facilitate the QA department to gather accurate data for writing the trustworthy assessment report. Second, it can guarantee the reliability and usability of records used as evidence proving how the university has done regarding the nine elements of academic quality. This will increase the accountability of the university's score achievement because it results from the measurement of existing records not newly documents created specifically for this purpose. Finally, it does not either generate extra works or increase workload. Records are already kept in the system waiting for capturing to use as evidence. Therefore, the universities have not to spend human resources and time for finding data and creating new records. This will enhance the universities' working efficiency.

The advantage of records keeping system leads to the emergence and development of records management theory and practice. Many researches such as Shepherd and Yeo (2003), Williams (2006), and International Organization for Standardization (2016) have explained how to implement and have suggested three main parts contributing to the success of the system. This will discuss and apply to the Thai higher educational institution context.

The nature of records

According to Shepherd and Yeo (2003), Williams (2006), Duranti (2010), and International Organization for Standardization (2016), the records keeping system cannot be implemented unless the universities understand the nature and importance of records. First, records are not a general document but a document comprising of the seven elements of being a record. In other words, documents can be regarded as a record if they achieve the seven elements of being a record. Second, records can be used as evidence because of their evidential value appraised by the seven elements of being a record. Third, data and information within records are trustworthy since the creator and provenance are clarified in records. Finally, records must be kept and maintained their seven elements of being a record to ensure that they can be used as evidence.

The above data identifies the nature of being a record that can be concluded as the following diagram.
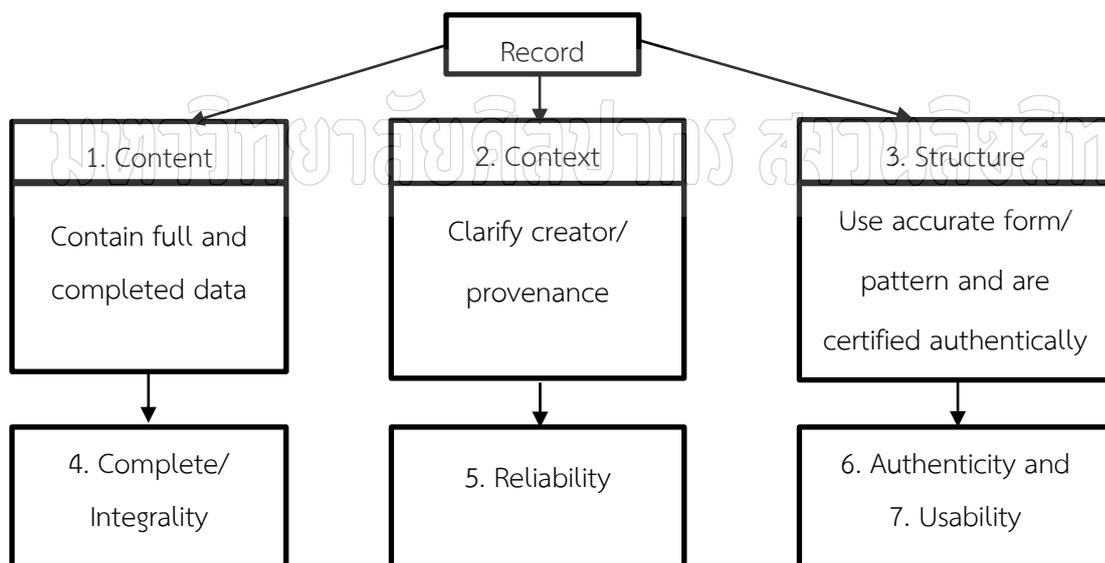
Diagram 1: The nature of a record or the seven elements of being a record

Using the seven key features set in the diagram 1, the universities are able to clarify which university's documents are regarded as a record. Likewise, Shepherd and Yeo (2003), Williams (2006), and International Organization for Standardization (2016) have discussed how to keep records and maintain their nature of being a record. They have summarized that the establishment of records management unit, the design of system to capture, keep, and access records, and the creation of file plan and retention schedule are the key elements of this success. The next section provides the suggestion how to implement them effectively in the Thai higher educational context.

Key steps for a successful implementation of records keeping system in the context of Thai universities

The implementation of records management unit

The universities should establish one department called the records management unit to take responsible for the records keeping system. Most universities in UK, USA, Europe and Australia e.g. University of Liverpool, University of Warwick, Harvard University, Princeton University, and The University of Sydney, have the records management unit and set up the core functions as follows:

(1)   design and implement the records keeping system;

(2)   provide knowledge, workshop, and training courses regarding records management;

(3)   manage records kept in the university's repository; and

(4)   monitor and develop the records keeping system.

The above core functions guarantee that the universities will have the mechanism to design, implement and develop the records keeping system in order to facilitate the universities to capture, keep, access and use records as evidence at any time.

The design of records keeping system

According to Shepherd and Yeo (2003), Williams (2006), and International Organization for Standardization (2016), the records keeping system consists of three main steps. The first step is finding the organizational operation's environment. This facilitates the records management unit to design and implement the records keeping system to fit with the nature of organization. For the Thai higher educational institution context, its organizational operation's environment is constituted from (1) the vision, mission, strategy, and action plan that focus on an achievement of being an academic excellence, (2) the organizational structure that is hierarchical, and vertical, (3) the regulatory environment that comprises of the internal and external quality assessment, the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF : Hed), the Standards for Higher Education Curriculum, and the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (1999), and (4) the organizational culture that shaped by the Thai culture, the bureaucracy of Thai public organization and the university culture (Poolsatitiwat, 2018).

The data from analyzing the universities' operation environment also indicates the relationship between the universities' organizational structure, and the internal quality assessment as described in the following diagram.

Nine elements of Internal Quality Assessment	University Organizational Structure
(1) Policy	(1) Office of Presidents (2) University Council (3) Administrative Committee (4) Staff Union
(2) Teaching	(1) Faculties (2) Human Resources (3) Research (4) Library and IT
(3) Students	(1) Faculties (2) Student supports
(4) Research	(1) Research (2) Faculties
(5) Academic Services	(1) Administrative Committee (2) Human Resources (3) Faculties
(6) Preservation of arts and culture	(1) Faculties (2) Art Centre
(7) Administration	(1) University Council (2) Administrative Committee
(8) Finance	(1) University Council (2) Finance (3) Administrative Committee
(9) Quality Control	(1) QA (2) All departments

Diagram 2: The relationship between the universities' organizational structure and the internal quality assessment

The diagram 2 identifies that records regarding the nine elements of academic quality are created and kept in many departments. For instance, records regarding the third element called students are created and kept in the faculties and the students support department. This identifies that to write the trustworthy assessment report regarding the students, the QA department should be able to access, capture, and merge those records to show how the university has done on students.

Likewise, the data from analyzing the organizational culture of the universities in Thailand reflects the impact of organizational culture on designing the records keeping system. According to Curry & Moore (2003) and Oliver (2007), the organizational culture can be cultivated from the national, occupational and corporate culture. First, as being Thai organization, the universities in Thailand are shaped by the Thai culture which fit with the full bureaucracy type described by Hofstede (2001) and Oliver (2007). This identifies that the universities have developed the top down policy to manage their organization. Second, as a higher educational institution in the context of Thai culture, most universities in Thailand always pay attention to their academic reputation and accountability which are always represented by the internal quality assessment's score rather than by the approach of quality improvement. Finally, as the university's philosophy is the core value of the organization, corporate culture of the universities relates to their philosophy. Since the data indicates that the term "academic excellences" is regarded as the universities' philosophy, their corporate culture will focus on the academic excellences.

In addition, this organizational culture contributes to the approach that the universities implement for creating and keeping records for the internal quality assessment. The following process diagram explains the relationship between them clearly.

Organizational Culture	
Present practice for records keeping	Recommended practice for better records keeping
Reputation and Accountability	Sustainable quality
Guaranteed by Quality Assurance	Complying with regulatory
Information for supporting auditing	Information for supporting and improving working process
Finding evidence for auditing	Keeping records systemically
Allocate staff and time to create documents and records	Capture and use record as evidence and information for assurance and improvement

Diagram 3: The relationship between the organizational culture and records keeping

The diagram 3 infers that to be able to implement the records keeping system, the universities must change their organizational culture to focus on keeping and using records as evidence and information for improvement their working process to enhance their academic quality rather than that only for quality assurance and auditing purposes. This culture facilitates the records management unit to increase records awareness among the universities staff and lead to their commitment to create, keep, use, and access records to comply with the records keeping system.

The second step is analyzing the functions of their organization. Shepherd and Yeo (2003) have discussed that records are created for organizational activities and have to be kept for use as an evidence of that activities. Organizations have done these activities to achieve their functions. *Records; therefore, must be kept according to the organizational functions*. This will facilitate the organizational managements to monitor and assess whether or not their organizations fulfill their functions. The data from analyzing the functions of Thai higher educational institutions identifies that their main functions are (1) preparing graduates, (2) conducting research, (3) providing academic services, (4) preserving arts and culture, and (5) developing organizational management comprising of policy, administration, finance, and quality control. The five functions of Thai universities are similar and fit perfectly with the nine elements of academic quality. This infers that the internal quality assessment is the evaluation of the university's functions. If the universities keep their records according to their functions, they will have both reliable information and evidence to show how they have done to fulfill their organizational functions and the nine elements of academic quality.

The final step is the inclusion of the record keeping system as the key university's policy. To ensure that the records keeping system can be implemented, Shepherd and Yeo (2003) have recommended to raise it as an organizational policy that all departments including all staff must comply with. The data from surveying the university's records identifies that university's records used for the internal quality assessment are created and kept by various departments (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). The university staff who are responsible for creating and keeping the records have developed their own keeping system with limited knowledge regarding the nature and importance of records (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). This limitation leads to the inability and ignorance to design the central records keeping system. Most staff have argued that it is too difficult and not necessary because they have never faced the serious problem of unable to access records and it is not their duties (Poolsatitiwat, 2018). This

argument implies that the records management unit should provide the knowledge and increase the awareness of all university staff regarding why and how to keep records. In addition, the records keeping function should be addressed as the main responsibility of all university staff and put it as one of their key performance indicators.
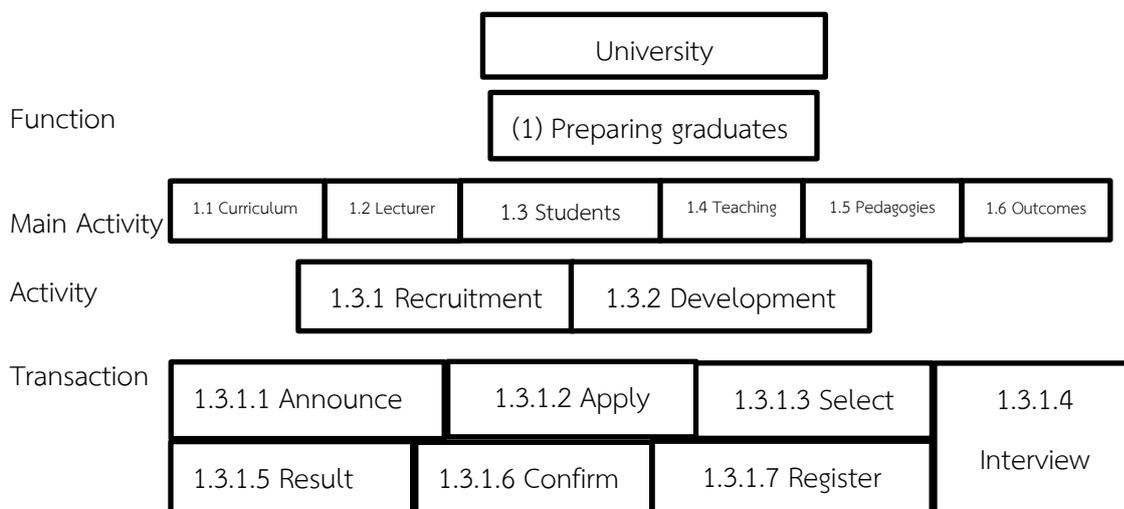
The creation of file plan and retention schedule

The third or last element of the records keeping system is the creation of file plan and retention schedule. These are key tools all departments should use as guidelines for keeping their records to fulfill their functions and achieve the internal quality assessment. Many researches regarding how to create the file plan have been conducted and most of them e.g. Shepherd and Yeo (2003), Williams (2006) have suggested that the creation of file plan consists of three main processes.

The first process is an identification of both the activities necessary for fulfilling each function and the working process or transactions within that activities. This facilitate the records management unit to understand the flow of records and able to capture, link and merge records in each function. For instance, one function of the universities is preparing graduates. To fulfill the function of preparing graduates, the universities have to run six main activities which are (1) preparing curriculum, (2) recruiting and developing lecturers, (3) recruiting and developing students, (4) preparing and developing teaching facilities and learning environment, (5) developing pedagogies, and (6) assessing and evaluating students' outcomes.

Each main activity may consist of more than one activity. For example, the third activity, preparing and developing students, consists of two activities which are recruiting students and developing students.

Likewise, each activity has its own working process or transactions. The records management unit has to consult with the departments to find out the transaction of all activities. After finding the functions, activities, and transactions, the records management unit designs the diagram representing how the universities have done on their functions as the following example.

University			

Function (1) Preparing graduates

Main Activity

1.1 Curriculum	1.2 Lecturer	1.3 Students	1.4 Teaching	1.5 Pedagogies	1.6 Outcomes

Activity

1.3.1 Recruitment	1.3.2 Development

Transaction

1.3.1.1 Announce	1.3.1.2 Apply	1.3.1.3 Select	1.3.1.4 Interview
1.3.1.5 Result	1.3.1.6 Confirm	1.3.1.7 Register	

Diagram 4: Functions, Activities, and Transaction of Universities in Thailand (via example of the function 'Preparing graduates')

The above example diagram indicates that the working process of recruiting students consists of seven transactions. Each transaction creates records as evidence of that transaction. For example, the university notice regarding the application of new students is a record of recruiting announcement which is the first transaction of recruitment activity. Likewise, the university notice regarding the list and the identification number of new students is a record of registering which is the final transaction of recruitment activity. After designing all functions, all activities, and all transactions like the above example, the file plan has been created by dividing the file into at least five layers from function to item as the following example file plan:

Function	1. Preparing graduates
Main activity	1.3 Students
Activity	1.3.1 Recruitment
Transaction	1.3.1.1 Recruiting Announcement
Item	Minute of Meeting and University's notice year 2017, 2018, 2019, etc.

Diagram 5: The example of file plan for function 'Preparing graduates'

The above example of file plan or diagram 5 indicates that any record regarding the transaction of recruiting announcement must be transferred to keep in file 1.3.1.1 Recruiting Announcement and this file is one file of the file 1.3.1 Recruitment which is one file of the file 1.3 Students. Finally, the file 1.3 Students is one file of the file 1 Preparing graduates which is one file of the university file which consists of five files according to five main functions of the university.

Shepherd and Yeo (2003), Williams (2006), and International Organization for Standardization (2016) have discussed that the departmental staff cannot transfer their records to be kept in the file plan unless they understand the type of record in each file. In addition, the records in each file will not be able to maintain their nature of being records and secure from losing if any staff can access every file. These identify that the condition of access and the guidelines for implementing a file plan should be included. All staff should be trained to understand the guidelines, the file plan, and the access restriction. According to Shepherd and Yeo (2003), the access condition should be set up in the transaction level and according to the need to use the records. For example, the file 1.3.1.1 Recruiting Announcement should be accessed only by those who create and need to use the records kept in this file. To know who create and use the records, the records management unit should study the university structure and consult with the departments. The file plan, the guidelines and the access restriction must be approved by both the university executive board and the university council.

In addition, Elizabeth and Yeo (2003), Williams (2006), and International Organization for Standardization (2016) have suggested to write the record retention schedule. They explained that the record retention schedule will facilitate the universities to know the status of records and when the records are required to transfer to keep in archives or able to be destroyed. The following diagram show the example of the university record retention schedule.

File name	Keep in the university	Keep in the repository	Deposition	Remarks
1 Preparing graduates	8 years	12 years		
1.3 Students	8 years	12 years		
1.3.1 Recruitment	8 years	12 years		
1.3.1.1 Recruiting Announcement	8 years	12 years	Kept as archives	University Act/ Archives Act
1.3.1.2 Applying	8 years	12 years	Destroyed	University Act/ Archives Act
1.3.1.3. Selecting	8 years	12 years	Kept as archives	University Act/ Archives Act
1.3.1.4 Interview	8 years	12 years	Destroyed	University Act/ Archives Act
1.3.1.5 Resulting	8 years	12 years	Kept as archives	University Act/ Archives Act
1.3.1.6 Confirming	8 years	12 years	Destroyed	University Act/ Archives Act
1.3.1.7 Registering	8 years	12 years	Kept as archives	University Act/ Archives Act

Diagram 6: The example of university records retention schedule

The diagram 6 identifies that the records retention schedule cannot be designed unless the file plan has already been created. The period to keep in the university means how long the records have been kept for using to comply with the university regulations. Likewise, the period to keep in the repository means how long the records have been kept to comply with the Archives Act. In addition, the decision to keep or destroy records is made on the basis of the appraisal theory. According to Williams (2006), the records regarding the formal regulation such as the Act, the Notices, or the Orders should be kept permanently since they contain organizational value. Since records in the file 1.3.1.1 Recruiting Announcement, the file 1.3.1.3 Selecting, the file 1.3.1.5 Resulting, and the file 1.3.1.7 Registering are regarded as the University Notices, they should be kept permanently as archives. However, according to

Ministry of Culture (2013), the resting file cannot be destroyed without the approval from the National Archives of Thailand. This indicates that the universities have to send the list of the file they would like to destroy to ask the permission from the National Archives of Thailand.

The implementation of file plan and records retention schedule provide at least three benefits facilitating both the university working efficiency and the internal quality assessment as described in the following paragraphs.

Establishment of PDCA cycle of management[1]

First, the functions of the universities, the activities to fulfill each function, and the transactions of each activity presented in the file plan reflects how the universities have done from planning, doing, assessing, and developing each activity to support their organizational functions. This identifies how the universities have developed the PDCA cycle of management which is the quality cycle that the internal quality assessment has been expecting the universities to establish for developing their organization to reach their expecting quality. Likewise, the records in each file are the evidence showing their success and failure in each transaction, activity, and function. This can be regarded as a big data that the university managements can trust and use to make a right decision regarding the improvement of their working efficiency to achieve their organizational functions which seem to be fit with the nine elements of academic quality designed by the internal quality assessment. For instance, the students' recruit activity starts from planning the recruiting approach which can be regarded as "P" in the quality cycle. This has been approved by the records of minute of meeting kept in the file 1.3.1.1 Recruiting Announcement (see Diagram 5: The example of file plan, p.13). Then, the recruiting approach set in the plan has been done chronologically. This can be regarded as "D" in the quality cycle and has been approved by the records kept in the file 1.3.1.1-1.3.1.7 (see Diagram 4: Functions, Activities, and Transaction of Universities in Thailand, p.12). Finally, the recruiting approach has been assessed and developed. This can be regarded as "C" and "A" in the quality cycle and has been approved by the records of minute of meeting and the university's notice kept in the file 1.3.1.1 Recruiting Announcement (see Diagram 5: The example of file plan, p.13).

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[1] PDCA cycle of management is the managing process that is used for assessing the university quality of management. P stands for plan. D stands for do. C stands for check and A stands for act.

Development of best practice for enhancing quality

Second, the university managements can study and assess the transaction of each activity through the records kept in the file plan. This facilitates the university managements to develop the best practice of each activity and represent it as the approach universities have done to enhance their quality. For example, the records kept in the file 1.3.1.1 Recruiting Announcement have shown the approach of university's recruiting announcement which has been developed continuously through the PDCA cycle of management. First, the minutes of meeting provide data regarding the recruitment approach done in each year. Second, the university's notices provide data regarding (1) the opening programs and the expecting numbers of student, (2) the requiring qualification of prospecting students in each program, (3) the method to submit application, (4) the examination process, and (5) the assessment process in each year. Finally, the university's recruiting approach have been developed according to the decision made from these data. This means that the university's recruiting approach has been changed after the records have shown that the previous one has not been worked well. This facilitates the university managements to develop their working process to reach the best one.

Representation of Good governance

Finally, according to the manual of internal quality assessment, good governance is one of significant key indicator in the seventh element of the nine elements of academic quality. The manual clarifies the good governance as (1) transparency, (2) responsibility, (3) verification, (5) participation, and (6) worthy (Office of the Higher Education Commission, OHEC, 2014). These six elements have never been identified specifically. However, considering the relationship between functions, activities, and transactions represented in the universities file plan, these six elements are the universities' managing approach that is processed according to the universities' functions and by those who have the authority and responsibility. In addition, the transactions in each activity and function should be able to access and assess in order to develop them to comply with the universities' regulations. Since the good governance is related to how the universities have done in each transaction, activity, and function, the showing of records in the file plan is the representation of universities' good governance. For instance, the records of minutes of meeting and university's notices kept in the file 1.3.1.1 Recruiting Announcement have proved that the university's recruitment approach has been developed from the decision of the recruitment committee which has the authority to do. In addition, their decision is derived from the accurate data collecting from the relevant records.

Since the records keeping system support and facilitate the internal quality assessment, the implementation is suggested. The following section provides the good practice that the universities can learn and apply to fit with their organization.

Good practices for keeping records systematically with the central records keeping system

To implement the central records keeping system in the Thai universities context, the universities may apply the following practices as guidelines.

First, the records management policy and the records management unit should be established formally to ensure that the university's executive board, the university's council, and the departments will continuously support the records management unit to develop the records management system. Likewise, the records management unit should have authority to design, implement and monitor the file plan and the records retention schedule including training, supporting and driving the departments to keep their records to comply with the file plan and the records retention schedule. These are the first factors contributing to the success of implementing the central records keeping system since the organizational structure, management, and culture of the Thai universities are shaped by the hierarchical structure, the top down management, and the role culture respectively. Shepherd and Yeo (2003) have discussed that staff working in the organization with the role culture need the formal authority to process their work.

Second, the record survey, the operational environment in particular the regulatory environment should be studied and analyzed to find out (1) the nature of records in each department, (2) the function and structure of each department and (3) the regulations and the standards each department must comply with. These facilitate the records management unit to design the file plan and the records retention schedule to fit with the working process and the nature of records in each department.

Third, the file plan and the records retention schedule should be developed as soon as the functions of universities and the regulatory environment have been changed. These will prevent the loss of records significant for the new function and regulation.

Fourth, the records management unit should monitor both the system and the departments regularly at least once a month to ensure that the records will not be lost and the departments will keep records to comply with the system.

Finally, records awareness should be enhanced by explaining both the management level and the staff level the importance of records on their work in particular how the records support the quality improvement. The records management unit should also provide all university staff the knowledge regarding (1) the definition and importance of records, (2) the records management process, (3) the file plan, (4) the records retention schedule, and (5) the regulations regarding creating, keeping, using, and access to the university records. The records management unit should design the workshops or the training courses on these five areas and include them in the compulsory courses that all staff must be trained. This, however, needs the support from the human resource department, the university's executive board and the university's council. The records management unit should discuss with them.

Following these five suggestions, the universities can basically implement the central records keeping system to keep, secure and access the university's records as soon as needed.

Conclusion

The internal quality assessment is one of the regulations that the universities have to comply with. To gain reputation and accountability in Thai society, the universities need the high score of assessment. Since the records keeping system has never been implemented, the universities have to spend extra time and allocate staff to collect data and create records specifically for the assessment. This affects not only the reliability of the records but also the accountability of the universities. Before improving the records keeping system to solve these problems, the universities should concern the function, the culture and the working process of their organization, as these are the significant factors contributing to the success of implementing the record keeping system.

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