

PRESERVING INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY IN THE BANGLADESH CIVIL SERVICE: EXISTING PRACTICES, CHALLENGES, AND WAY FORWARD

Final Report

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Evaluator's Authorization

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To Whom It May Concern,

This is to certify that the research team comprising, Dr. Asif M. Shahan (Team Leader), Nahida Akter (Team Member), Mr. Raihan Ahamed (Team Member), Ms. Taslima Aktar (Team Member), Mr. Md. Sadiur Rahman (Team Member) have completed a research study titled: "Preserving Institutional Memory in the Bangladesh Civil Service: Existing Practices, Challenges and Way Forward".

Throughout the course of the research, the team maintained close communication with me, actively seeking guidance and incorporating feedback at every stage, including after the mid-term evaluation. I affirm that the team accommodated my advice with diligence and professionalism.

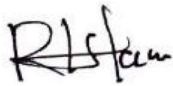
The research employed a rigorous qualitative methodology, combining Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), process tracing, and comparative case studies of selected countries. The analysis was thorough, offering meaningful insights into how institutional memory is preserved, the existing gaps in Bangladesh's civil service, and the broader challenges of documentation, record-keeping, and knowledge transfer within government organizations.

One of the notable outcomes of this study is its contribution to understanding how institutional memory preservation can strengthen policy continuity and governance effectiveness in Bangladesh. The study not only highlights systemic barriers such as weak archiving practices, inadequate digital integration, and the absence of formal succession planning but also proposes practical strategies, including a national-level Knowledge Management policy, digitization of records, and institutionalized training for civil servants.

I am pleased to acknowledge the standard, depth, and relevance of this research, which I believe will serve as an important reference for policymakers, practitioners, and academicians concerned with strengthening institutional capacity and governance in Bangladesh.

I am pleased to acknowledge the standard and relevance of this research.

Sincerely,

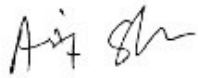


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Declaration

I affirm that the research project titled "Preserving Institutional Memory in the Bangladesh Civil Service: Existing Practices, Challenges, and Way Forward" is entirely my work and has been exclusively prepared for submission to the Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy in Dhaka, Bangladesh. I confirm that this report has not been previously submitted for assessment or publication elsewhere, either partially or in its entirety. The report includes proper attribution for all sources of material utilized.

Team Leader



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I express my profound gratitude to all individuals whose contributions made the successful completion of this research project possible.

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I am sincerely thankful to Syeda Salina Aziz, Fellow of Practice and Head of the Governance and Politics Cluster at BIGD, for her overall guidance in developing the research proposal, as well as for her thoughtful insights, encouragement, and constructive feedback at every stage of the study. Her continuous support and intellectual contributions enriched both the rigor and clarity of this research.

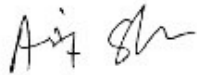
Special thanks are due to the following co-authors of the Governance and Politics Cluster, BIGD and Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy (BCSAA), for their relentless efforts in drafting at every stage: Nahida Akter (Director of Research and Publication, Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy), Raihan Ahamed (Program Coordinator, BIGD), Taslima Aktar (Senior Research Associate, BIGD), and Md. Sadiur Rahman (Program Assistant, BIGD). Their dedication, critical writing skills, and substantial contributions to drafting, reviewing, and refining the manuscript were invaluable. Their collaborative engagement as co-authors significantly strengthened the analytical depth and overall quality of this research.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all respondents who generously shared their time, perspectives, and experiences despite their demanding professional schedules.

Their openness and thoughtful reflections provided the foundation for this study, offering unique insights into the complexities of institutional memory in the Bangladesh Civil Service.

I am also thankful to Dr. M. Rezaul Islam (Professor, Department of Public Health, University of Dhaka) for his valuable role in overseeing the draft and providing thorough reviews at every stage. His constructive feedback and guidance enhanced both the clarity and quality of the final report.

Finally, I gratefully acknowledge all those whose diverse contributions supported this research in different ways. While their names may not all be mentioned here, their assistance and commitment were vital to the successful completion of this project.



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Executive Summary

Institutional memory refers to the accumulated knowledge, experience, and historical record embedded within an organization over time. In the public sector, where frequent personnel turnover and shifting political dynamics are common, preserving institutional memory is critical to ensuring administrative continuity, informed policymaking, and effective governance. While many countries have adopted structured knowledge management systems, the civil service in Bangladesh continues to struggle with fragmented, ad hoc, and person-dependent approaches. Recognizing this gap, this research by the Governance and Politics Cluster of the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD, BRAC University) aims to examine the current state of institutional memory preservation in the Bangladesh Civil Service, identify challenges, and propose strategic solutions from the ground reality.

The study sets out to explore existing practices in institutional memory retention and knowledge transfer across various government entities within the Civil Service in Bangladesh. It further aims to identify systemic and cultural barriers to effective preservation, assess Bangladesh's position in comparison with selected international examples, and recommend practical reforms for policy and administrative adoption. The research addresses both formal and informal practices of knowledge management in public institutions and considers how these impact institutional learning, decision-making, and service continuity.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative approach that includes Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with senior and mid-level government officials from five central ministries and one upazila-level administration to capture the local level reality. A process tracing technique was used to explore institutional memory dynamics in depth, particularly in the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority (BPPA) as a case study. Additionally, a comparative case analysis of countries like India, Malaysia, South Korea, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Philippines was undertaken. The study identified eight key indicators to evaluate institutional memory systems,

including legal frameworks, succession planning, digital infrastructure, archiving mechanisms, and training initiatives.

The findings reveal that Bangladesh lacks a dedicated legal or policy framework for preserving institutional memory. While some policies such as the Secretariat Instructions (2014) provide basic guidance on documentation, there is no overarching national strategy or knowledge management blueprint. Most government institutions continue to rely on paper-based documentation systems, despite efforts to digitize through platforms like D-Nothi and E-Government Procurement (E-GP). These digital systems remain underutilized, especially at the field level, due to infrastructural limitations, lack of training, trained personnel, and institutional resistance to change.

Another significant challenge is the absence of structured succession planning or formal handover procedures during transfers of officers. Most knowledge transfer occurs informally, often through verbal communication with previous officers over phone or reliance on long-serving support staff. Institutional memory, therefore, becomes highly individualized and vulnerable to disruption. There is also little effort to capture tacit knowledge from retiring or transferring staff through exit interviews or documentation protocols.

Compared to international best practices, Bangladesh lags considerably. Countries like South Korea and Australia have adopted comprehensive frameworks that integrate legal mandates, digital technologies, and professional training to preserve institutional knowledge. These countries also utilize metadata standards, centralized archives, and proactive documentation cultures, none of which are systematically implemented in Bangladesh's civil service.

To move forward, the study recommends several strategic interventions from systematic analysis. These include formulating a national Knowledge Management policy, institutionalizing formal succession planning and handover protocols, expanding digital archiving infrastructure across all levels of government, and embedding documentation responsibilities within performance evaluations. It also proposes introducing

comprehensive training on documentation and knowledge retention for civil servants and establishing a centralized institutional memory cell to guide and monitor implementation. In conclusion, the Bangladesh Civil Service faces a growing risk of institutional amnesia, where valuable knowledge is lost with each personnel change or administrative disruption. Unless urgent reforms are undertaken to formalize and modernize knowledge retention mechanisms, the public sector will continue to suffer from inefficiencies, policy discontinuity, and weakened institutional capacity. This study offers both a diagnostic and a prescriptive framework to transform Bangladesh's civil service into a more resilient, memory-conscious, and future-ready institution.

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List of Acronyms

AGRkMS	Australian Government Recordkeeping Metadata Standard
BCSAA	Bangladesh Civil Service Administrative Academy
BPPA	Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority
CoP	Communities of Practice
CPTU	Central Procurement Technical Unit
CSC	Civil Service Commission
DAP	Development Academy of the Philippines
DDMS	Digital Document Management System
EDMS	Electronic Document Management Systems
EGP	Electronic Government Procurement
EKTP	Exit Knowledge Transfer Programs
GKIM	Government Knowledge and Information Management
GOE EGDMS	Generic Office Environment - Electronic Government Document Management System
ICT	Information Communication and Technology
INTAN	National Institute of Public Administration
KII	Key Informant Interviews
KM	Knowledge Management
KONEPS	Korea On-line E Procurement System
MAMPU	Malaysia Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NAI	National Archives of India
NAP	National Archives of the Philippines
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NHI	National Human Resources Development Institute
PhilGEPS	Philippine Government Electronic Procurement System
PMDP	Public Management Development Program
PPR	Public Procurement Rules
RMU	Records Management Units
SCS	Senior Civil Service
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer

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1. Introduction

Institutional memory is usually defined as the collective knowledge, information, and expertise embedded within an organization that it accumulates over time (Walsh & Ungson, 1991). Pollitt (2008) defines it as an 'archive of the past' where explicit knowledge, documented in manuals and archives, and tacit knowledge, residing in the minds of individuals within the organization, interact with each other in shaping the organization's learning while shaping and developing policies (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Scott et al, 2019). Institutional memory, therefore, serves as a foundation for organizational learning, influencing how organizations adapt to changes and challenges (Szubanski, 1996).

The significance of institutional memory in enhancing administrative efficiency and ensuring good governance is well-recognized in public administration literature. When Lindblom (1959) talked about 'the science of muddling through' in highlighting the importance of 'incrementalism in policy making, he indicated how, "...institutional memories are important for enabling 'tried and tested' solutions from the past to resurface, and with small modifications, be used again" (Corbett et al, 2017: 556-557). It is, however, important to note that even though studies of the past implicitly acknowledged the importance of institutional memory, it is only recently that scholars have started to concentrate on understanding and analyzing the explicit value of institutional memory more systematically (Pollitt, 2000; Rhodes & Tiernan, 2014; Corbett et al., 2017).

However, organizations face many challenges in preserving institutional memory, such as knowledge loss due to employee turnover, changes in leadership, and technological advancements (Darr et al., 1995; Walsh & Maloney, 2007). The tension between exploration of new knowledge and exploitation of existing knowledge, known as the exploration-exploitation dilemma, constantly challenges preserving institutional memory (March, 1991). As indicated earlier, recent studies are now increasingly concentrating on this particular issue while arguing that organizational learning is unlikely to affect organizational performance if the organization itself keeps forgetting- "what is the good

of learning if the institution quickly forgets again- if it suffers from a form of organizational Alzheimer's disease?' (Pollitt, 2000: 5). These studies draw attention to a specific phenomenon, often known as 'institutional amnesia', where the public institutions lose their "...ability and make use of possibilities relevant past experiences" (Pollitt, 2000). According to these studies, public institutions worldwide are afflicted with this 'disease' that needs to be addressed to optimize the use of organizational learning.

In the context of Bangladesh, from the beginning of this century, the government has introduced various initiatives to improve the efficiency and responsiveness of the civil service. Emphasis has been placed on data-driven and evidence-based policy making, and within this context, organizational learning and knowledge management have gained significance. It is important to note that by doing so, the government has acknowledged the importance of knowledge sharing within and among organizations. Nevertheless, the issue of preserving institutional memory or preventing institutional amnesia has largely been ignored. Within this context, this study takes into account the significance of institutional memory and examines how knowledge is retained and transferred, particularly in the Bangladesh civil service administration.

This study explores current practices, challenges, and recommendations regarding institutional memory management in public sector institutions, based on interviews with key informants from various ministries and departments.

2. Problem Statement, Research Scope, and Research Questions

In the context of government organizations in Bangladesh, the challenge of knowledge retention becomes critical as frequent personnel changes occur. The absence of a comprehensive understanding and effective frameworks for preserving, transferring, and utilizing institutional memory within public sector entities poses a significant threat to organizational sustainability, learning, and adaptability. While private corporations have explored and implemented knowledge management strategies to gain a competitive advantage, there exists a notable research gap regarding the institutional memory of public sector organizations in Bangladesh. This is particularly salient as a significant body

of literature highlights a persistent performance gap between the public and private sectors in Bangladesh. The public sector is often characterized by challenges such as bureaucratic inertia, a lack of accountability, and resistance to reform, which collectively hinder efficiency and innovation (Siddiquee, 2010; Uddin & Chowdhury, 2016). In contrast, the private sector is generally perceived as more agile and performance-driven. This disparity extends to knowledge management; while private firms increasingly leverage knowledge as a strategic asset for competitive advantage, public sector organizations in Bangladesh have been slow to adopt systematic knowledge management practices, often suffering from fragmented information systems and a lack of a knowledge-sharing culture (Hossain & Islam, 2015). The private sector's relative success, therefore, underscores the urgency of examining why public institutions lag in areas like institutional memory, which is critical for long-term performance and effective governance.

The lack of extensive research on this specific aspect hinders the identification of best practices and potential areas for improvement within the Bangladesh civil service administration. Without a clear understanding of how institutional knowledge is currently managed and transferred, government organizations risk losing valuable expertise and insights, impeding their ability to navigate transitions effectively.

This research addresses this problem by investigating the practices and challenges associated with institutional memory management across government organizations in Bangladesh. This research has a comprehensive analysis of knowledge retention in the face of organizational growth, evaluates existing knowledge transfer frameworks, and draws comparisons with private sector practices. Ultimately, the research endeavors to offer practical recommendations for enhancing knowledge management practices within the public sector, ensuring the seamless preservation and utilization of institutional knowledge for the long-term success of government organizations in Bangladesh.

The research aims to gain a comparative understanding of the knowledge management capability and strategies, particularly in knowledge acquisition and retention in the Bangladeshi public sector. The research provides an understanding of the current practices regarding the accumulation, storage, and transfer of knowledge within public

sector organizations in different countries and then elucidates the same knowledge in Bangladesh.

The countries selected for this comparative overview are countries whose public sector and governance are similar to Bangladesh. For example, similarities in institutions, government structure, bureaucratic practices, the propensity of personnel change, how public employees are selected and transferred, etc. Countries with similar cultural and social contexts are considered.

2.1. Research scope

The research aims to comprehensively investigate the practices and challenges associated with the preservation, transfer, and utilization of institutional memory within government organizations in Bangladesh. The scope encompasses the areas of

- a. Knowledge retention in growing organizations,
- b. Effective knowledge transfer frameworks,
- c. Importance of institutional memory for organizational sustainability,
- d. Comparison with private sector practices,
- e. Research gap in the public sector of Bangladesh, and
- f. International comparative analysis.

By addressing these key areas, the research aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of knowledge management in the public sector, offering practical recommendations for improving institutional memory practices within government organizations in Bangladesh.

2.2. Research questions

The research questions are:

- a) What are the current practices and strategies used to preserve institutional memory in Bangladesh civil service?

- b) How do existing institutional practices and organizational cultures within the civil service create challenges or barriers to preserving and transferring institutional memory?
- c) What are some effective strategies used by other countries to preserve institutional memory in public administration?
- d) How can steps be taken by the government agencies to preserve institutional memory in the future?

2.3. Research Rationale, Limitations, and Future Scope

There is a growing body of studies regarding institutional memory and knowledge management in the public sector. However, there is hardly any empirical work on the institutional memory in the public sector of Bangladesh. Studies on knowledge management largely focus on information institutions like libraries. Almost nothing is documented regarding whether and how knowledge is retained and shared in the public sector of Bangladesh. This makes research on this specific topic difficult, yet necessary to explore. This study can be the beginning of filling the evidence gap on the issues of institutional memory in the Bangladeshi government sector. This will also help to develop significant policies to implement effective strategies in the institutional memory management system within the government agencies of Bangladesh. Relevant stakeholders, such as academicians, development practitioners, and researchers, will gain an understanding of the current practices of institutional memory management within government institutions.

Despite the qualitative nature of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. One of the prime constraints was the limited time and financial resources available for the research. Due to these constraints, the study could not encompass a full-scale national assessment of institutional memory practices across all government agencies. Instead, the research focused on selected ministries and government agencies for its purposive sampling technique and one local administrative unit, offering a context-specific analysis rather than a holistic portrayal of the Bangladesh civil service. While this approach provided in-depth insights into localized practices and challenges, it restricts the

generalizability of the findings to the broader public administration landscape in Bangladesh.

Additionally, the study was constrained by its qualitative design and relatively small sample size. With only 11 interviews conducted due to time limitation, the perspectives captured may not fully represent the diversity of experiences and practices across the entire public sector. Furthermore, the absence of a longitudinal approach also due to resource limitation means that the study could not track knowledge management transformations over time, which would have added value to understanding systemic changes and institutional learning dynamics.

Looking ahead, future research should aim to expand the scope by including a more diverse range of public institutions from both central and local administrative units, allowing for a more representative understanding of institutional memory practices across Bangladesh. Moreover, longitudinal research examining how institutional memory evolves in response to digital interventions (e.g., D-Nothi adoption, knowledge management training) would be particularly valuable for better understanding of institutional memory preservation. This study could be further extended by exploring into the impact of political transitions, informal practices, and support staff roles on institutional memory, and that could offer deeper insights into systemic resilience and potential reform strategies.

3. Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore the practices, obstacles, and institutional frameworks associated with preserving and transferring institutional memory in Bangladesh's public sector. To thoroughly tackle the research questions, the methodology integrates primary data gathering with a comparative analysis of secondary data from chosen international case studies. This strategy emphasizes depth rather than breadth, facilitating an in-depth investigation of organizational processes and the dynamics of knowledge management.

As mentioned earlier, the study employs both primary and secondary data collection methods to answer the research questions. Using Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with public sector officials, we collected primary data to get a comprehensive idea of the accumulation, storage, and transfer of knowledge within organizations. In addition, we followed up on select case studies with in-depth interviews, where we could delve more deeply. We use a Process tracing method to gain a comprehensive understanding of the overall processes. However, we sacrificed breadth to focus on depth. which helps us to understand the procedures and barriers.

For the secondary data collection, we did a comparative case analysis using literature on the experiences of other countries in preserving institutional memory. To make this process methodologically sound, we have chosen literature with experiences of three countries. The literature collected elucidates some findings that answer research questions 3 and 4. The findings that we find useful are 1) what the other countries have done to preserve institutional memory, 2) the kind of challenges they have faced to do this, 3) their progress and success in preserving institutional memory, and 4) the lessons we can take from their experiences.

3.1. Primary Data Collection

As part of the primary data collection, significant qualitative research methods, like in-depth interviews, Key Informant Interviews, and process tracking, were used. To evaluate how knowledge is gathered, stored, and shared within government bodies, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were carried out with seasoned public sector officials. These respondents were chosen based on their pivotal positions and experience within the organizations. The KIIs offered perspectives on both formal and informal knowledge management methods, reflecting personal experiences, viewpoints, and institutional practices.

Alongside KIIs, in-depth interviews were performed as part of targeted case studies. These discussions investigated the operational processes more thoroughly, emphasizing the precise mechanisms, obstacles, and facilitators of institutional memory within each

organization. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of intricate and context-specific factors that might not be uncovered in wider surveys.

To examine and reconstruct institutional procedures and decision-making pathways, we utilized the process tracing method. This approach enabled us to outline the sequence of occurrences, knowledge transfers, and policy actions to comprehend how organizational memory is created, preserved, or disrupted (George & Bennett, 2005). Through this perspective, we explored causal mechanisms and institutional dynamics at both the policy and operational levels.

3.2. Secondary Data Analysis

To enhance the primary data and offer an international viewpoint, the research employed a comparative case study approach involving seven countries recognized for their organized methods of preserving institutional memory. The secondary data was gathered purposively from scholarly articles, governmental publications, and knowledge management frameworks pertinent to:

- Strategies and legal structures for maintaining records and retaining knowledge within institutions
- Obstacles faced in establishing memory practices within organizations
- The efficacy and influence of various knowledge management models and practices
- Insights gained and their relevance to the context of Bangladesh

This comparative evaluation deepened the comprehension of institutional memory as a concern in global governance and provided empirical standards to frame the findings from Bangladesh.

3.3. Case selection

We selected multiple government organizations from the central level and one local-level government organization for this study. Given the exploratory and small-scale qualitative nature of this study, it was not feasible to cover all government institutions. Therefore, a

purposive sampling approach was adopted to select a diverse yet relevant group of government entities. The selection was guided by the objective of understanding institutional memory practices in organizations that manage large volumes of data and have long-standing administrative responsibilities.

At the central level, institutions such as the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority (BPPA) were selected because of their critical role in handling public procurement and tenders—areas that require rigorous documentation and knowledge preservation. Similarly, the Department of Land Records was included due to its long institutional history and the extensive datasets it manages related to land ownership and administration.

The Department of Social Welfare was selected because of its need to manage grassroots-level data and coordinate with other government bodies such as the Election Commission and local government institutions. These collaborations demand effective information management and data preservation.

Additionally, the Department of Disaster Management was chosen as Bangladesh is highly disaster-prone, and this agency plays a key role in collecting and preserving critical data on disaster impacts. Institutional memory in this department is vital for policy formulation, implementation, and long-term disaster risk management.

To capture a perspective from the local level, we also included the UNO office in Gazipur. This allowed us to explore how institutional memory is managed at the field level and to identify grassroots challenges related to documentation, archiving, and continuity during administrative transfers.

Overall, the selection of organizations aimed to represent a cross-section of government entities with differing scopes of data responsibility, administrative levels, and relevance to institutional memory systems.

- **Central Level Organizations:**

- Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority (BPPA), Ministry of Planning
- Department of Disaster Management

- Department of Social Services
- Department of Land Records and Survey
- **Local Level Organization:**
 - **Gazipur Sadar Upazila Administration**, selected for its role in implementing local administrative and welfare programs. Due to the frequent transfer of Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs), this institution provides a relevant case for understanding the challenges of knowledge continuity at the grassroots level.

We picked institutions that deal with the core areas of national development and long-term projects. In general, the organizations that work on technical issues and long-term projects need to preserve Institutional Knowledge more. It helps them to perform their responsibilities efficiently and effectively. Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority (BPPA), under the Ministry of Planning, Department of Disaster Management, Department of Social Welfare, and Department of Land and Records, fits this criterion. Another institution chosen is the Gazipur Sadar Upazila Administration, which is responsible for carrying out local administrative and welfare programs in the locality. Since local development is a priority area for the government, and UNO transfer is very fast and common, leading to difficulties in knowledge transfer and retention, there is strong justification for choosing this institution.

3.4. Sample and Respondent Profile

We have interviewed a total of 11 government officials from the mentioned organizations. The interviewees were senior and mid-level officials, with a variety of recent and long-term employees. We have interviewed one person from each organization who was part of these organizations and only recently transferred to another organization. We also reviewed available documents that guide the knowledge management of these organizations, or documents that show how documentation in these organizations is done. The officials interviewed include:

- **Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority (BPPA):**
 - Ex-Director General
 - Two Directors

- Deputy Secretary

- **Gazipur Sadar Upazila Administration:**
 - Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO)
 - Upazila Social Service Officer
 - Upazila Project Implementation Officer

- **Other Organizations:**
 - Senior Assistant Secretary, Cabinet Division
 - Assistant Director, Department of Social Services
 - Deputy Director (Settlement Operation-2), Department of Land Records and Surveys
 - Director, Department of Disaster Management

The selected methodology provides a solid foundation for understanding the complex and diverse aspects of institutional memory in the Bangladeshi public sector. By integrating qualitative methods like Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), detailed case studies, and process tracing with comparative analysis on an international scale, the research encompasses both the individual experiences of knowledge management and the broader policy landscape influencing them. This methodological strategy guarantees that the results are both firmly rooted in empirical evidence and framed within a global context.

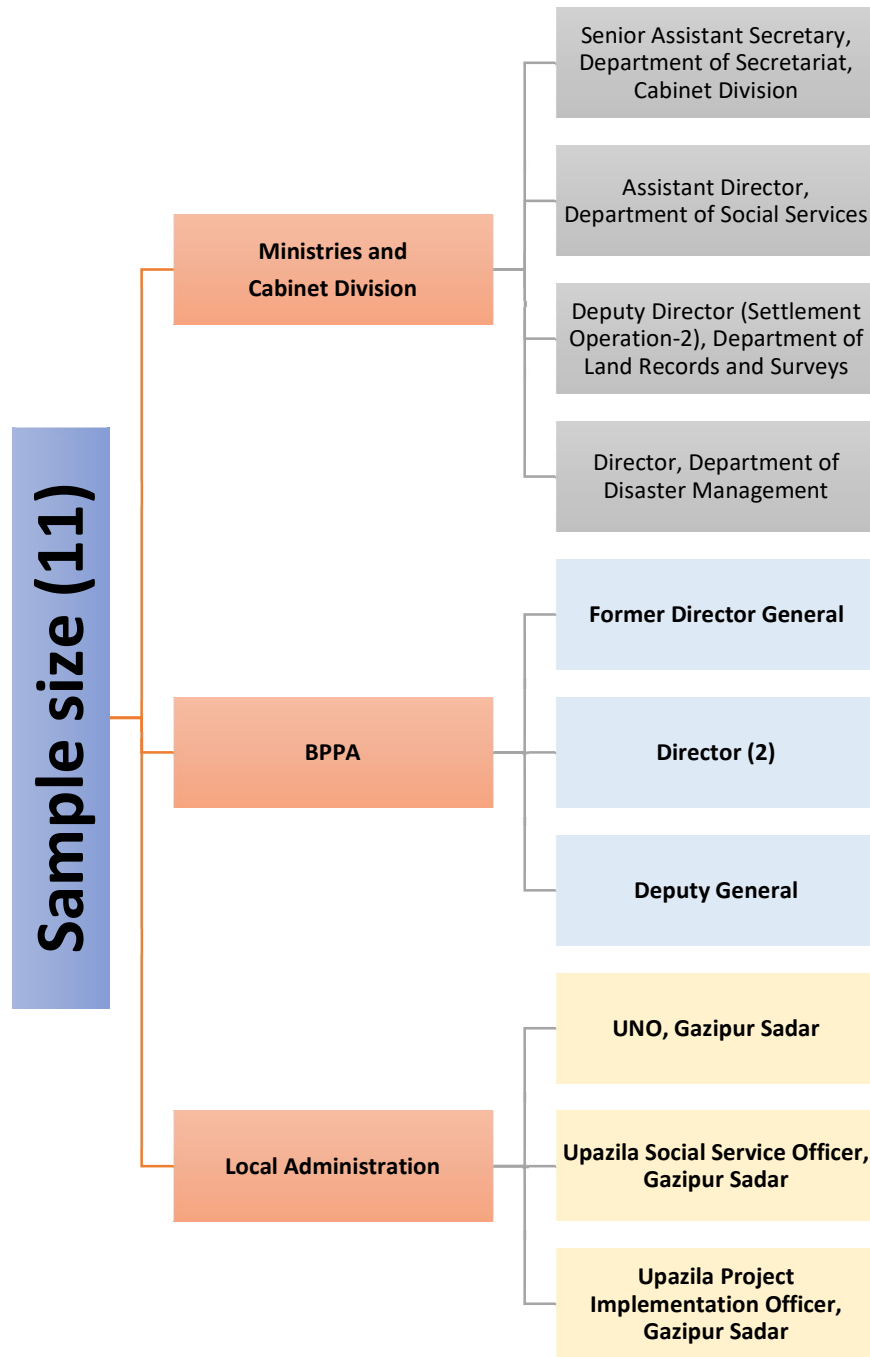


Figure 1 Sample and Respondent Profile

4. Operationalization of Research Questions

4.1. Definition of Institutional Memory Preservation in Civil Service

This study defines institutional memory preservation as the strategic retention, dissemination, and application of organizational knowledge, both tacit and explicit, over time, personnel changes, and structural modifications. Institutional memory comprises "archived information from an organization's history" (Walsh & Ungson, 1991, p. 61), the preservation of the past (Walsh & Ungson, 1991), and the contextual understanding that facilitates continuity and decision-making (Huber, 1991). It encompasses not only documents and digital repositories but also the tacit knowledge exchanged interpersonally (Harrison, 2004) and the narrative or collective reflection that participants undertake to comprehend the past (Corbett et al., 2017; Linde, 2008; Pollitt, 2009).

Innovations in information technologies, including digital repositories, knowledge management platforms, and collaborative tools, have enhanced institutional memory by increasing its accessibility and durability (Alavi & Tiwana, 2002). Furthermore, different studies propose that institutional memory constitutes a "dynamic memory" influenced by interactions, practices, and adaptations, rather than a static repository (Corbett et al., 2017).

In the public sector, institutional memory is often preserved through formal and informal systems. According to Harrison (2004), public sector institutions rely heavily on a blend of codified documentation (e.g., reports, guidelines, and laws) and tacit knowledge shared through interpersonal interactions and mentorship. However, Harrison notes that a lack of formal knowledge management strategies in many governmental organizations leads to the rapid erosion of institutional memory when staff members leave or retire.

The challenge of maintaining institutional memory in public administration is compounded by high staff turnover and political instability. Bureaucratic turnover is a recurring theme in the literature on developing countries. A study by Bovens (2008) notes that political transitions and changes in government can lead to the intentional destruction or neglect of records tied to the previous regime, which can impede policy continuity and governance effectiveness. This is particularly relevant to countries like

Bangladesh, where political shifts often lead to abrupt changes in leadership at all levels of government.

To mitigate this issue, Lindbloom (2006) advocates for the institutionalization of knowledge management practices through legal and regulatory frameworks. He suggests that policies should mandate the retention of critical documents, files, and reports for long-term storage and accessibility.

4.2. A Cross-Country Analysis

Globally, contemporary approaches to preserving institutional memory in the civil service have evolved beyond traditional paper-based record-keeping to encompass a comprehensive knowledge management system that integrates legislative mandates, technological advancements, and human resource development strategies.

This section examines institutional memory preservation strategies across nine countries—India, Malaysia, South Korea, Australia, the United Kingdom, Kenya, the United States, and the Philippines—to identify their patterns of institutional memory preservation, innovations, and lessons learned in this critical area of public administration. The analysis focuses on three key dimensions: legislative and regulatory frameworks that mandate memory preservation activities, technological innovations that enable systematic knowledge capture and retrieval, and human resource development initiatives that build organizational capacity for knowledge management.

The following countries, selected for this analysis, represent diverse geographical regions, administrative and institutional histories, and different levels of economic development, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how different contexts shape institutional memory preservation strategies over time. From South Korea's sophisticated digital integration to Kenya's infrastructure-constrained but systematic approach, these cases illustrate both the universal importance of institutional memory and the varied pathways through which governments seek to preserve and leverage their organizational knowledge assets.

4.2.1. Institutional Memory Preservation in India

India's institutional memory preservation strategy operates through a multi-layered approach combining legislative mandates with technological innovation. The regulatory foundation stems from the Public Records Act of 1993 and accompanying Public Records Rules of 1997, establishing systematic protocols for government record retention and archival processes. Central to this framework is the National Archives of India (NAI), which functions as the primary custodian of government documents deemed historically significant. Operational implementation occurs through Records Management Units (RMUs) distributed across various ministries, each staffed with specialized Record Officers tasked with maintaining cataloguing standards and implementing retention protocols. Professional development in this domain is facilitated by the National Academy of Administration, which has integrated comprehensive training modules covering administrative protocols, governance innovation case analyses, and inter-state best practice adoption into both initial and continuing education programs (Sarker, 2017). The modernization aspect is represented by the e-Office Mission Mode Project, a component of the broader Digital India Initiative, which seeks to minimize paper-based processes while strengthening document traceability and maintaining record authenticity throughout government operations.

4.2.2. Institutional Memory Preservation in Malaysia

Malaysia's institutional memory framework represents a sophisticated blend of legislative requirements and strategic knowledge management initiatives. The cornerstone legislation, National Archives Act 2003 (Act 629), establishes mandatory protocols for government agencies to systematically organize, safeguard, and transition valuable public records to Malaysia's National Archives. This statutory framework delineates specific procedures for document evaluation, categorization, and transfer processes, thereby securing long-term preservation of organizational expertise. The knowledge management dimension is addressed through Malaysia's "Knowledge Management Blueprint for the Public Sector" (2009), developed by the Malaysia Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU), which obligates agencies to extract implicit knowledge through diverse mechanisms including professional communities of practice,

centralized knowledge databases, and structured departure interviews (MAMPU, 2009). Digital infrastructure support comes through MyGovUC and OpenGovPortal systems, which establish uniform standards for digital documentation and facilitate inter-agency information exchange, ensuring knowledge continuity across personnel transitions and enabling rapid information access during policy development phases. Educational reinforcement occurs through the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN), which embeds record management, knowledge management, and best practice modules within civil service training curricula. The system is further strengthened by Exit Knowledge Transfer Programs (EKTP), designed to facilitate knowledge transmission from departing senior officials to their successors (Ismail & Hassan, 2015).

4.2.3. Institutional Memory Preservation in South Korea

South Korea has established arguably the most sophisticated institutional memory preservation ecosystem globally, built upon comprehensive legislative foundations and innovative digital solutions. The Public Records Management Act (2000) mandates systematic approaches to record classification, storage, and disposal across all governmental entities. Implementation requirements include the designation of Records Managers within each agency, development of internal governance protocols, and adoption of standardized digital preservation systems. This infrastructure enables retrieval of historical decision-making records, promoting cross-administrative learning and continuity. Digital advancement is codified through the Electronic Government Act (2001), which promotes digitization objectives, paperwork reduction, and transparency enhancement while establishing the regulatory environment supporting systems such as the Korea On-line E-Procurement System (KONEPS). KONEPS has revolutionized public procurement through comprehensive process integration within a unified digital environment. Currently utilized by over 95% of public institutions, KONEPS maintains real-time archives of all transactions, contracts, and vendor communications, effectively preventing institutional knowledge loss during staff transitions while enhancing corruption deterrence through comprehensive audit trails (Yeo & Lee, 2021).

Professional development is institutionalized through the Act on the Capacity Development of Public Officials (2015), which establishes mandatory lifelong learning

requirements for civil servants, including annual training hour obligations and strategic skill development participation. The National Human Resources Development Institute (NHI) operates as the central learning authority, delivering competency-focused education in public ethics, policy formulation, and crisis management, frequently utilizing archived case studies and historical scenarios for practical learning applications. Leadership development occurs through the Senior Civil Service (SCS) System, implemented in 2006, which emphasizes merit-based advancement and competency evaluation, particularly in leadership capabilities and strategic reasoning. This ensures that key institutional positions are occupied by individuals capable of institutionalizing and transferring knowledge across policy cycles. Research by Kim and Lee (2020) demonstrates that the SCS system promotes internal accountability while reducing dependence on informal knowledge networks, thereby formalizing institutional memory practices. The Proactive Administration Policy (2019) mandates documentation of problem-solving approaches, decision-making processes, and outcome achievements (Park, 2021). This framework operates beyond rule-based compliance, incorporating innovative practice repositories that support bold, context-sensitive administrative actions. Performance evaluation systems specifically examine continuity and effectiveness of learning documentation and digital service provision, with evidence-based policymaking emphasis reinforcing the strategic importance of comprehensive record maintenance and organizational memory preservation.

4.2.4. Institutional Memory Preservation in Australia

Australia's institutional memory architecture centers around the National Archives of Australia (NAA), established through the Archives Act 1983, which mandates Commonwealth agencies to maintain comprehensive documentation of valuable records, encompassing policy determinations, official correspondence, project assessments, and administrative guidelines. Strategic direction comes from the Digital Continuity Policy (2020) and subsequent Building Trust in the Public Record Policy (2021-2025), which orient agencies toward creating accessible digital documentation while recognizing public records as both administrative tools and community resources. Technical infrastructure includes GovCMS systems and government-wide standards for metadata management, retention scheduling, and digital preservation protocols. Knowledge management

strategies encompass multiple approaches: Communities of Practice (CoPs) operating within and between departments, utilization of intranet systems and shared digital environments for preserving both explicit and tacit knowledge, and structured handover procedures for senior leadership and rotating personnel. A significant technical advancement is the Australian Government Recordkeeping Metadata Standard (AGRkMS) framework, developed by NAA, which requires government entities to apply standardized metadata tagging and structuring to digital records. This system facilitates effective information retrieval and contextualization while strengthening organizational memory capabilities (Reed, 2015).

4.2.5. Institutional Memory Preservation in United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's institutional memory system operates through The National Archives (TNA), governed by the Public Records Act 1958, which mandates systematic record retention and transfer from government departments to the National Archives following specified timeframes, typically spanning 20 years. TNA maintains responsibility for preserving records in accessible formats for both government personnel and public use, while providing comprehensive guidance to government agencies regarding information lifecycle management and long-term retention strategies. Professional development occurs through the Government Knowledge and Information Management (GKIM) profession, administered by the civil service, which provides training programs, competency frameworks, and professional communities focused on developing expertise in knowledge management, metadata application, and information distribution. Strategic guidance comes from the Knowledge Principles for Government, a framework emphasizing proactive knowledge stewardship and transitioning from reactive documentation practices toward proactive knowledge generation that supports policy continuity and service delivery consistency. The system incorporates informal knowledge sharing mechanisms across similar roles and functions, complemented by standardized handover documentation and succession planning protocols for senior civil service positions.

4.2.6. Institutional Memory Preservation in United States

The United States foundations rest upon the Federal Records Act (1950), which establishes the regulatory framework for federal record management and requires agencies to maintain comprehensive documentation programs covering their operational activities, including electronic record integration. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) ensures proper maintenance and accessibility of essential records for future reference and use. Specialized knowledge preservation initiatives include agency-specific programs such as the FBI's Bureaupedia system, created to capture senior agent expertise and mitigate knowledge attrition resulting from retirement transitions (Bain, 2008). System reinforcement occurs through targeted training program investments designed to enhance public servants' capabilities in record management and knowledge management practices, fostering organizational cultures that prioritize knowledge sharing and institutional retention across federal agencies.

4.2.7. Institutional Memory Preservation in Philippines

The Philippines has pursued institutional memory preservation through comprehensive digital transformation, implementing the Philippine Government Electronic Procurement System (PhilGEPS) and Integrated Government Philippines (iGovPhil) platforms to digitize and standardize record-keeping practices across government agencies. These systems aim to reduce reliance on individual knowledge retention by preserving organizational expertise in digital formats. Regulatory guidance was updated in 2019 when the National Archives of the Philippines (NAP) issued revised records management guidelines emphasizing systematic approaches to public record classification, retention, and disposal. Capacity development coordination occurs through the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) and Civil Service Commission (CSC), which deliver regular knowledge and information management (KIM) training to civil servants, providing government employees with systematic tools for knowledge recording, sharing, and transfer. The Public Management Development Program (PMDP) incorporates knowledge management and leadership transition components, demonstrating increasing recognition of memory continuity as a strategic governance asset.

4.2.8. Institutional Memory Preservation in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, public sector institutions have faced significant barriers to the effective adoption of knowledge management and digital systems. A report by Kabir and Uddin (2013) highlights the inefficiencies in the Bangladeshi public administration system, specifically the lack of a coherent knowledge management policy and the absence of a central repository for institutional knowledge. These inefficiencies are compounded by staff shortages, reliance on manual file-handling systems, and resistance to adopting digital tools.

The Government Record Rooms and the Central Archival Authority in Bangladesh are one of the key structures for institutional memory management. Government record rooms in Bangladesh play a critical role in maintaining and preserving administrative records, including legal documents, correspondence, circulars, and reports generated by various public offices. These rooms exist at both the district and upazila levels and are typically maintained by the district administration under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioners. While some record rooms function effectively and are regularly updated, many face challenges such as poor infrastructure, inadequate staffing, lack of digitization, and limited budget allocations for preservation.

Record rooms often rely on manual cataloguing systems and face risks from environmental hazards, pests, and deterioration due to improper storage conditions. Efforts to modernize these record rooms through digitization have been introduced in select districts under government-led projects such as the Access to Information (a2i) programme, but widespread implementation remains uneven.

On the other hand the Directorate of Archives and Libraries, operating under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, serves as the Central Archival Authority in Bangladesh. It is tasked with collecting, preserving, and managing official records and historical documents of national importance. The Directorate plays a key role in institutional memory preservation by:

- Receiving and archiving records from government ministries and departments after a specified retention period.

- Providing guidelines for record management and preservation to various government bodies.
- Facilitating access to archival materials for researchers, students, and the public.
- Organizing training programs for public officials on proper documentation and record handling.
- Undertaking conservation and restoration of damaged historical documents.

Despite its central mandate, the Directorate faces capacity constraints, including outdated infrastructure, limited professional staffing, and insufficient coordination with line ministries and local offices. This hampers its ability to function as a robust guardian of the nation's documentary heritage.

Bangladesh also has legal and policy frameworks for institutional memory management. The Public Records Act 2011 is the primary legislative framework governing the management and preservation of government records in Bangladesh. Key provisions include:

- Mandatory retention and categorization of public records by all government bodies.
- Transfer of selected records to the Directorate of Archives and Libraries for long-term preservation.
- Prohibition of unauthorized destruction or disposal of public records.
- Designation of record officers in each ministry or department responsible for compliance.

While the Act establishes a legal foundation, enforcement and implementation remain inconsistent across departments, often due to low awareness and resource limitations.

The National Archives Policy, though not always uniformly enforced, outlines procedures for:

- Identifying records of historical or administrative value.
- Standardizing cataloguing and indexing methods.
- Promoting digitization of archival materials.
- Coordinating between the Directorate and line ministries for the timely transfer of records.

The policy also encourages the integration of modern technology for preservation and access, though progress has been limited in many sectors.

Several circulars and administrative orders have been issued by the Ministry of Public Administration and the Cabinet Division to improve institutional memory practices. These include:

- Guidelines for record retention schedules by category and department.
- Orders to appoint Record Officers in ministries to coordinate with the Directorate of Archives.
- Directives promoting e-filing and digital archiving through platforms such as the National e-Government Document Management System (e-DMS).

However, compliance with these circulars varies, and there is a need for stronger monitoring and capacity building to ensure effective record-keeping across government institutions.

In a comparative perspective, private firms generally operationalize knowledge management (KM) earlier and more comprehensively than public organizations due to clearer performance incentives and less procedural complexity (McAdam & Reid, 2000). Bangladesh's private sector shows this pattern vividly: multiple empirical studies on commercial banks—where KM is commonly proxied through intellectual capital (IC) systems—demonstrate that IC efficiency (e.g., MVAIC/VAIC) significantly and robustly improves bank performance (Faruq et al., 2023; Majumder et al., 2023). These findings indicate that structured knowledge capture, human/structural capital development, and data-driven routines are already embedded across leading private financial institutions, aligning with mature KM practice. By contrast, evidence from Bangladesh's public sector highlights barriers—traditional bureaucratic culture, weak KM policies, limited managerial support, and uneven ICT integration—that slow systematic knowledge retention and transfer (Rahman, 2018; Mostofa & Othman, 2024). Recent studies like Mattsson's (2025) work further show that public organizations often rely on new information systems to curb coordination problems and petty corruption (Mattsson, 2025), underscoring that KM-enabling systems are still being built rather than fully institutionalized. Therefore, it is easy to understand that Bangladesh is currently “going better” on KM implementation in the Private sector than in the public sector.

In summary, while Bangladesh has a formal framework for record management and institutional memory preservation, the current functioning of record rooms and the Central Archival Authority faces systemic challenges. Strengthening institutional capacity, investing in digitization, and ensuring rigorous implementation of existing laws and policies are essential to preserving the documentary legacy of public administration in Bangladesh.

However, in recent years, efforts to digitize government processes have begun to show promise. The implementation of E-Government Procurement (EGP) and D-Nothi platforms is a step in the right direction, as these systems aim to digitize procurement documents and administrative files, making them accessible to multiple stakeholders. The work of Hossain (2020) reveals that although EGP has successfully improved procurement transparency, its potential to serve as a comprehensive tool for institutional memory management remains underexplored.

Studies on the adoption of digital tools in Bangladesh's public administration, such as the work by Siddiqui and Mollah (2018), identify challenges such as limited training, infrastructural limitations, and a lack of technical expertise as major barriers to full implementation. Their findings suggest that without addressing these gaps, the effectiveness of digital systems in preserving institutional memory will be limited.

4.3 Conceptual framework of the study: Indicators of Institutional Knowledge Preservation and Record Management

From the cross-country analysis and reviewing the existing literature, it can be said that a strong institutional framework for preserving knowledge and managing records is crucial for ensuring continuity in administration, transparency, and the protection of institutional memory. Numerous studies have emphasized the significance of institutional memory in sustaining organizational efficiency. Furthermore, various researchers have identified key factors that influence the success of systems designed for preserving institutional

memory. The indicators listed below embody the essential elements that characterize the effectiveness and thoroughness of such systems.

4.3.1. Legal Framework for Record Preservation

The cornerstone of a successful knowledge management system is a formal legal framework that requires the retention and systematic safeguarding of institutional records. This encompasses national laws or agency-specific regulations that obligate organizations to keep documentation for specified durations. Such frameworks not only validate recordkeeping initiatives but also safeguard records against arbitrary destruction. According to Walsh and Ungson (1991), organizational memory is frequently rooted in written records, while the OECD (2015) highlights the importance of legal requirements in maintaining transparency and historical accountability within the public sector. These regulations usually outline the types of documents that must be retained, the duration for which they should be kept, the responsibilities of record custodians, and the penalties for failing to comply.

4.3.2. Knowledge Management Policy

A thorough Knowledge Management Policy offers strategic guidance for the collection, organization, and sharing of knowledge throughout the institution. Whether it is a nationwide framework or a directive specific to an agency, such policies define the goals, responsibilities, and necessary tools for effective knowledge retention. Liebowitz (2004) points out that KM policies need to be proactive and regularly revised to keep pace with technological and organizational developments. Davenport and Prusak (1998) additionally argue that in the absence of a clear KM plan, knowledge often remains compartmentalized, resulting in inefficiencies and a reduction in institutional intelligence.

4.3.3 Information Classification Standards

Effective retrieval and use of records rely on strong classification systems that apply metadata, tags, and organizational structures to documents. These frameworks allow users to find, understand, and reuse information efficiently. Reed (2015) highlights the significance of implementing international best practices for classification, such as those created by The National Archives (TNA) in the UK and the National Archives and Records

Administration (NARA) in the USA. Typically, these standards encompass criteria for document sensitivity, retention timelines, subject categorization, and access permissions—ensuring both compliance and user-friendliness.

4.3.4. Central Archival Authority

A centralized archival authority is essential for the uniform collection, organization, and safeguarding of official documents. This authority acts as the national steward of public records, ensuring consistency among different governmental branches and organizations. Alavi and Tiwana (2002) contend that these central bodies mitigate the fragmentation of knowledge systems by offering coordinated oversight, metadata standards, and solutions for long-term storage. These institutions typically operate repositories—both physical and digital—where historically important documents are preserved and made available for research and governance activities.

4.3.5. Digital Recordkeeping Infrastructure-

Contemporary record preservation increasingly depends on a robust digital framework that facilitates the capture, storage, and retrieval of documents. This encompasses document management systems, cloud-based repositories, and secure databases that guarantee records are not only maintained but also readily accessible when necessary. Hossain (2020) points out that the digital divide presents a significant challenge in developing countries, while Alavi and Tiwana (2002) emphasize the importance of digital platforms in improving data integration and minimizing redundancy. A successful digital infrastructure is secure, interoperable, and adheres to international standards for electronic recordkeeping.

4.3.6. Succession Practices and Informal Handover

One of the most critical moments for potential knowledge loss occurs during personnel changes. A well-defined succession planning process guarantees that essential knowledge is passed on efficiently during retirements, resignations, or shifts within departments. This process includes mentoring programs, overlapping work periods, documentation checklists, and peer debriefing sessions. Pollitt (2008) observes that numerous governments experience a "memory vacuum" following transitions, while Harrison (2004)

emphasizes the necessity of institutionalizing knowledge continuity within human resource development strategies. Efficient succession planning not only preserves organizational memory but also strengthens capacity building among new staff.

4.3.7. Exit Interviews and Knowledge Capture Mechanisms

Structured exit interviews and knowledge capture systems are essential tools for gathering implicit knowledge from departing staff. Instead of losing experiential insights, organizations can document lessons learned, process improvements, and institutional narratives via debriefings, knowledge repositories, and reflective writing. Ismail and Hassan (2015) emphasize the significance of both timing and organization in these interviews, while Corbett et al. (2017) advocate for incorporating these practices into larger knowledge management frameworks. These mechanisms not only help in retaining valuable insights but also promote a culture of knowledge sharing and introspection.

4.3.8. Institutionalized Knowledge Management Training

Ultimately, the enduring effectiveness of any knowledge management strategy relies on the provision of organized training programs that enhance staff skills in documentation, classification, digital tools, and knowledge management methodologies. These programs can be delivered internally or through national institutions that focus on public administration. McNabb (2007) emphasizes that ongoing learning is crucial for adapting to the changing landscape of knowledge management technologies and practices. Institutions like the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) and Malaysia's National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) exemplify how training can be embedded within organizations to foster a culture of documentation and improve technical skills.

To systematically evaluate institutional memory within government agencies, the key points discussed above are summarized in the table below:

Table 1 Indicators of Institutional Knowledge Preservation and Record Management

SL	Indicators	Description	Key Sources
01.	Legal Framework for Record Preservation	Existence of laws or regulations requiring record retention and public archives.	Walsh & Ungson (1991); OECD (2015)
02.	Central Archival Authority	A recognized and designated national body for the collection, classification, and preservation of government documents.	Alavi & Tiwana (2002)
03.	Digital Recordkeeping Infrastructure	Accessibility and implementation of digital platforms for record management.	Hossain (2020); Alavi & Tiwana (2002)
04.	Knowledge Management (KM) Policy	National or agency-specific KM frameworks or blueprints directing knowledge retention.	Liebowitz (2004); Davenport & Prusak (1998)
05.	Succession Planning	Established protocols for knowledge transfer during personnel changes.	Pollitt (2008); Harrison (2004)
06.	Information Classification Standards	Use of metadata and classification for efficient record retrieval.	Reed (2015); TNA (UK); NARA (USA)
07.	Exit Interviews and Knowledge Capture Mechanisms	Structured efforts to collect knowledge from retiring or transferred staff.	Ismail & Hassan (2015); Corbett et al. (2017)
08.	Institutionalized KM Training	Availability of formal and structured training programs focused on documentation and KM practices.	McNabb (2007); DAP (Philippines); INTAN (Malaysia)

5. Aligning Practice with Indicators: Insights on Knowledge Retention Strategies from Research Findings

Now we will discuss the findings from the qualitative fieldwork to reflect whether the existing institutional memory management system in the government institutions in Bangladesh matches these indicators. In this section, we will also focus on the findings regarding the existing practice of institutional memory management and knowledge retention strategies across the government institutes of Bangladesh.

5.1. Legal Framework and KM Policy: Challenges of Relying on Paper-Based Record Preservation

Bangladesh has no dedicated public records act, but there is Directorate of Archives and Libraries Ordinance (1973) exists, which can be considered as a knowledge management policy and a legal framework for records preservation. Also, Secretariat Instruction, 2014, instructs about the categorization, importance, and preservation methods of the documents used in the government institutions in Bangladesh.

According to the research findings, some specific and systemic mechanisms exist to manage the paper-based documentation and preservation of institutional memories. Four categories of files exist within the government institutes. These four types of files have different values and importance, and based on their impact and importance, files get priority for preservation. Ministerial ordinances serve as guidelines for institutional memory management practices, which specify how paper-based documents should be kept, sorted, and destroyed. Depending on the importance, some category "A" records may be discarded after five years, while others are kept forever. Furthermore, letters are frequently kept in guard files or master files with reference numbers kept up to date to provide traceability, while inconsistent referencing still presents a difficulty.

One of the respondents who is appointed as a Upazila Social Service Officer, Gazipur Sadar Upazila, mentioned that, “

- **Category A documents** must be preserved indefinitely (for life). These can be stored either as physical files, folders, or as digital (soft) copies. Presently, both hard and soft copies are maintained.
- **Category B documents** are to be preserved for up to 10 years. Examples include allocation letters or documents related to loan programs older than 10 years, which can be destroyed if deemed unnecessary. These are generally kept as hard copies, although sometimes soft copies are also maintained.
- **Category C documents** are to be preserved for up to 3 to 5 years. The preservation of this document continues as long as it remains useful. Government purchase orders, transfer orders of employees, etc., are included under this category of documents
- **Category D documents** are reviewed monthly, with non-essential items being destroyed regularly.”

Also, most of the documents of the government institutions have two parts, and the documents are stored in the record rooms. For organization and tracking of the documents, a register or catalog is maintained. One of the former directors of BPPA said that,

“Our documents are divided into two parts: one is correspondence and the other is notes. It is stated that when a file exceeds 100 pages, a new file should be opened. When movement of the document becomes impossible, it should be stored in the record room.”

So, based on the findings, it can be said that the hard copy of documentation is the most common form of institutional memory management, and the policy regarding knowledge management also instructs about the paper-based documentation procedure. Also, some of the respondents mentioned that the dual documentation approach, as it relies on paper-based documentation, has some challenges. Though the polices encourage digitization, the majority of the government institutions, from ministries in Dhaka to remote upazila administrations, rely on printed files, memos, registers, and handwritten

notes for preserving organizational knowledge. The dependency is not only habitual but functional in a bureaucratic context where access to digital infrastructure remains inconsistent. One of the respondents designated as a Deputy Secretary in BPPE mentioned that,

“The most popular form of managing institutional memory is through hard copy record files . Institutional memory includes various types of documents, such as opinion-based articles, project reports, ordinances, and official letters. Most government institutions have dedicated record rooms where these documents are preserved and organized for future reference. Each office has dedicated staff members responsible for maintaining and preserving record files. New officers often rely on this staff to help them understand the system and gain access to the specific files they need.”

An Assistant Director at the Department of Social Services described the dual-documentation approach:

“Hard copies are still required. To save time in work processes, both digital and hard copies are maintained simultaneously, as each file contains numerous documents, making it difficult to locate specific papers in the digital system.”

This hybrid system is common across departments, where hard copies are preferred for immediate access, legal referencing, and security. While digital records are officially recognized, officers often feel more confident working with physical documents. This attitude is deeply entrenched in the bureaucratic tradition passed down since the British colonial period. The situation is further exacerbated by infrastructural limitations. Many offices face significant spatial constraints in storing printed files. This spatial limitation forces staff to pile files in corners, corridors, or unregulated storerooms, leading to deterioration, misplacement, or permanent loss of documents. Nonetheless, officers continue to fall back on hard copies, especially when time is limited or when digital systems malfunction.

5.2. Adoption of Digital Systems: D-Nothi and Beyond

The recordkeeping system in some central-level government organizations in Bangladesh is highly advanced. In 2016, government offices began using the e-Nothi system, which was later upgraded to the D-Nothi system in 2023. These organizations have adopted digital systems like D-Nothi, and their practices are well aligned with the indicator *Digital Recordkeeping Infrastructure*.

The central government has repeatedly urged the introduction of a digital file management system, and the digital file management adopted by the government of Bangladesh is called D-Nothi and has emerged as a major initiative to modernize record-keeping and enhance transparency. Some of the government institutions, such as the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority (BPPA), D-Nothi, and digital archiving systems, are used to maintain procurement records and organizational memory. An assistant director of, Department of Social Services shared,

“The use of digital records (D-Nothi) has been in practice mostly since 2018. To save time in work processes, both digital and hard copies are maintained simultaneously, as each file contains numerous documents, making it difficult to locate specific papers in the traditional paper-based system. Digital file management facilitates quicker access.”

He also added,

In the future, the digital record system (D-Nothi) will likely become highly popular in file management, potentially replacing hard copies. However, maintaining both hard copies and digital records would be beneficial for archival purposes.”

Despite having various positive impacts, in many field offices and even some central ministries, digital systems are not fully implemented. D-Nothi is introduced mostly at the central level government institutions and the district level. A UNO in Gazipur Sadar commented,

“The digital system, particularly D-Nothi, has not been fully implemented across all sub-districts. The primary reasons for this include inertia and the absence of mandatory enforcement. Its usage is partial and fragmented.”

Therefore, the evidence from the qualitative interviews suggests that most government institutions heavily rely on hard copy files, a legacy of the colonial administrative system. These physical archival documents, stored in guard files, master files, and categorized record rooms, are considered the most accessible form of institutional knowledge management system. Mostly, the supporting staff are assigned to organize and manage these files based on ministerial guidelines that dictate document preservation, classification, and eventual disposal.

In equivalent, there are several government institutions that have adopted digital data management and archival systems, such as D-Nothi, e-documentation, software-based archiving, and digital data storage. A digital institutional memory management system is part of an initiative to reduce paper use and enhance file management. However, there are also limitations with the D-Nothi system, such as upload constraints, lack of real-time collaboration, inadequate access to the internet in the remote areas of the country, and low user adaptability, that have hindered its widespread adoption.

So, the research findings reveal that the institutional memory is managed through a mix of traditional and digital methods within government institutions in Bangladesh, and these methods vary in degrees of effectiveness across different departments. Along with these hybrid mechanisms of institutional memory management, some other practices exist across the government institutions in Bangladesh. Institutional memory preservation at the local level is a little different from the central level. One of the respondents, who is designated as Deputy Director at the Department of Land Records and Surveys, mentioned,

“Institutional memory is primarily preserved at the local administrative tier. Because most office staff are local residents, knowledge is retained both in documented form (files, letters) and through individuals lived experience and familiarity with office operations.”

5.3. Challenges in Centralized Archival Mechanism in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a Central Archival Authority and a legal framework in place to support archival processes. However, due to a lack of coordination among government institutions, an effective and well-coordinated centralized archival mechanism is absent. As a result, many central-level government organizations have developed their own individual archival systems. Additionally, record rooms at the district level often function as local archives.

The former director of the BPPA mentioned,

“When storing documents in the record room, a catalog must be created listing the contents of the file. This catalog should be placed on top of the file before it is stored. Additionally, there should be a list of all the documents in the record room. These documents were maintained by the staff. If we asked the staff to bring any additional documents, they would say, “Sir, there are two more documents. “By reviewing those, we could identify the institutional memory and extract valuable information. I had developed a library in BPPA for document storage, but due to the lack of trained manpower, that initiative became ineffective.”

5.4. Partial Implementation of Institutionalized Knowledge Management Training

Findings suggest that orientation programs and formal training are crucial for transferring institutional knowledge to new officers. Most of the government institutes offer orientation programs and foundational training, and through these, they are introduced to their regular duties and formal culture.

“New officers attend an orientation session to learn about the organizational culture and institutional memory. This model includes EGP (Electronic Government Procurement) and PPR (Public Procurement Rules) training sessions, and access to archived policy documents and reports,” shared a Director at BPPA.

However, this approach is not common. Most of the local-level offices receive minimal briefing. Also, the mid-level and top-level officials often inherit desks full of disorganized documents and are left to decipher institutional operations by themselves. Their understanding becomes fragmented and error-prone, leading to delays in project execution. The deputy director of BPPE shared her experience and said that,

"In my current role, I need to continuously study the subjects related to my work to stay updated. To do this, I review previous record files of relevant projects to better understand the ongoing tasks and the context of my responsibilities."

So, formal and structured training programs specifically focused on documentation and knowledge management practices are only partially available. Most government institutions provide orientation programs and foundational training for entry-level officers. These programs introduce new officers to the institutional culture, past projects, and digital systems. While helpful, this approach only partially aligns with the indicator *Institutionalized Knowledge Management Training*.

5.5. Lack of Formal Succession Practices in Bangladesh's Government Institutions

Not having a formal succession plan is one of the biggest gaps in knowledge retention across the government institutions in Bangladesh. As a result, responsibilities are often handed over informally among officials. This informal approach is not aligned with key indicators such as *Succession Planning*, *Exit Interviews*, and *Knowledge Capture Mechanisms*.

It is uncommon for departing officers to leave behind written documentation or handover notes that describe the state of a project, strategic choices, or outstanding problems. This leads to misunderstandings of files, recurrent correspondence with predecessors, or even delays in the project. When handover notes are utilized, they are informal and come in a range of quality levels.

A Director at BPPA shared a best-practice example:

“When an officer transfers, it is their responsibility to officially hand over their duties, including files containing institutional memory and knowledge, to the new officer. New officers attend an orientation session to learn about the organizational culture and institutional memory. Training and supervision by senior officers help fill gaps in understanding and managing institutional memory.”

Unfortunately, these kinds of procedures are uncommon and vary from ministry to ministry. Handover reports are not required by law, and the government does not offer templates or monitoring tools to make this happen.

5.6. Beyond the Indicators: Internal Innovations and Localized Practices in Knowledge Management

Beyond the standard indicators, many government institutions in Bangladesh have adopted internal innovations and localized practices that significantly contribute to institutional memory and knowledge management culture. These context-specific approaches, though informal, have proven to be effective in several cases. Notably, the *role of support staff in managing knowledge and learning through hierarchical transmission and informal guidance* is a key example of such practices that support ongoing learning and knowledge retention within institutions.

Apart from D-Nothi, few of the government institutions have developed internal servers to store organizational data and records. While the E-Government Procurement (EGP) system under BPPA stands out as a regional best practice, other departments lag in digital adaptation. Officials from the Department of Social Services and the Department of digester management mentioned that they have an internal digital database. At the upazila level, Excel-based asset tracking, virtual databases, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) are used to document operations.

An Upazila Project Implementation Officer shared:

“The Virtual Database is maintained at the upazila level... The SOD (Standard Operating Document) serves as institutional memory.”

5.6.1. Role of Support Staff in Managing Knowledge

Findings reveal that most of the government institutes appoint dedicated staff to manage paper-based files and record rooms and assist superior officers in navigating institutional documents. Mostly, these individuals play the role of informal knowledge holders, especially in offices where documentation is fragmented or poorly indexed. Particularly in field offices where officer turnover is common, office assistants and secretaries frequently serve as quiet stewards of institutional knowledge. They are extremely helpful during staff transfers because of their expertise with office operations, historical files, and procedural norms. When a new officer joins, these employees frequently fill in the knowledge vacuum. Also, in BPPA and a few other central-level institutions, a program manager oversees the digital archiving system, ensuring consistency in file storage and retrieval. One of the respondents, who is designated as Deputy Director, Department of Land Records and Surveys, shared her experience and said that,

“When I was designated at the Upozila level, I saw that the documentation is highly managed by the office staff, as frequent transfers occur. It requires new officers to learn and gain experience from the very beginning, which is currently a time-consuming process. So, they have to ask the supporting staff, and often the supporting staff become the key person to know the local context and existing institutional culture, which creates personal dependency.”

These assistants are often the most experienced and least mobile members of a department. Their long tenure enables them to build a mental archive of institutional history that officers depend on during transitions. While this system works informally, it is fragile. When support staff are transferred, retire, or fall ill, the institutional knowledge they carry vanishes. Yet, no formal mechanism exists to transfer this knowledge, making the continuity of memory highly person-dependent.

5.6.2. Learning Through Hierarchical Transmission and Informal Guidance

In practice, institutional memory is also managed informally through informal knowledge transfer among the officials. In the absence of official knowledge management systems, informal, experience-based learning is used in many government institutes. For

information about office customs, ongoing initiatives, and procedural specifics, junior officers—especially those recently posted—frequently go to senior coworkers, seasoned support personnel, or subordinates. When a new officer joins, they often depend on peer support, subordinate guidance, or informal communication with the predecessor to learn about ongoing projects and responsibilities. While formal orientation sessions and foundational trainings are provided, such as BPPA's in-house programs and the five-day induction for new officers in the Department of Disaster Management, these often fall short in capturing local knowledge or contextual understanding. The Director of the DPPE mentions,

"Junior officers learn about institutional memory from senior officers and through their previous work experience, including reviewing documents and reports and discussing with former officials. Officers also receive training on new and existing knowledge, with a digital archiving system in place for managing institutional memory."

5.7. A Case Study-

Based on the discussion about the indicators and the existing practice in this section, we will discuss the process tracing of a government institute in Bangladesh as a case study to have a better understanding of the current practice regarding institutional memory management across government institutes. This process tracking is based on the experience of the officials from the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority.

In the context of Bangladesh's civil service officers are frequently transferred from one department to another in accordance with administrative rules and procedures. These transfers typically occur without any formal handover, disrupting continuity and impeding the retention of institutional knowledge. For process tracing in institutional knowledge transfer, the case of the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority (BPPA) offers a revealing example of current practices related to institutional memory retention.

Upon joining BPPA, incoming officers rarely receive structured guidance from their predecessors. Instead, knowledge transfer begins with an informal handover—if it

happens at all—due to the absence of standardized documentation or mandated briefings. As a result, new officers must rely heavily on co-workers and long-serving support staff to understand their duties and navigate institutional norms. The process becomes a tacit and social one, rooted in interpersonal interactions rather than formal protocols. A director at BPPA reflected:

“When I joined my new department, I had to reach out to my superior officer to clarify my responsibilities... I also communicated with subordinates and studied files on my own.”

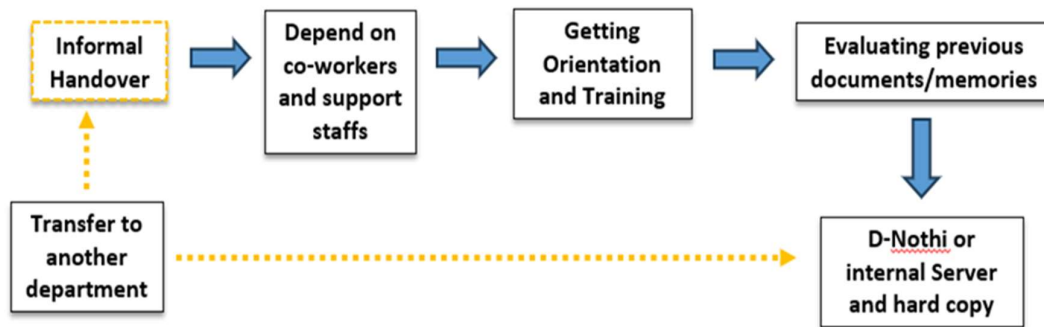


Figure 2 Process tracing of institutional knowledge preservation

Basically, BPPA’s knowledge transfer depends on tacit knowledge embedded in hierarchical relationships and individual experience. The institutional knowledge is not explicitly documented but passed along through verbal explanations and informal mentoring.

After a period of acclimatization, BPPA conducts 3-to-7-day orientation training for new officers. These sessions are held on-site and focus primarily on the E-Government Procurement (E-GP) system. Although there is a component that addresses archiving practices and institutional memory, this segment remains limited. The training serves as more as a functional introduction than a deep dive into historical knowledge or strategic continuity.

To support document access, BPPA has developed an internal digital server for storing archived information related to official and project activities. Officers have full access to this repository, where soft copies of administrative files are preserved. One senior official noted:

“Institutional memory is digitally archived on a server for easy access and management. The software for digital archiving is developed by in-house IT experts.”

Despite this infrastructure, the use of hard copies remains dominant. Officers maintain physical records as a routine part of project implementation, particularly for those funded by government or donor agencies. For external communications and budget submissions, the digital platform D-Nothi is used, but officers often prefer hard copies due to their tangibility, ease of annotation, and reduced dependence on digital literacy.

Once a project is completed, documents are archived in the storerooms. However, the retrieval process can be inefficient. Locating a document may take anywhere from 5–8 hours to several days, due to inadequate indexing and the lack of internationally standardized filing systems. As one Deputy Director observed:

“Retrieving archived documents can take multiple days due to poor record-keeping systems and the absence of standardized filing practices.”

In extreme cases, when documents are missing or irretrievable, officers turn to tacit sources—often retired colleagues or veteran support staff—to reconstruct institutional memory. This dependency on personal recollection rather than verified documentation exposes the fragility of the current system. One retired director candidly explained:

“In cases of missing documents, officers depend on the tacit knowledge of retired colleagues or long-term support staff. Now, even when I retire, many people from BPPA call me to inquire about the background information, but you cannot find the background of these decisions from the documents themselves.”

The root of this challenge lies in the absence of a formal knowledge dissemination framework. Government officers are transferred on short notice, and no mechanism is in place to facilitate structured knowledge transfer. Consequently, when officers leave, they

seldom feel obligated—or even prepared—to hand over institutional memories to their successors. This creates a cyclical pattern where institutional knowledge is continuously lost and must be rediscovered by new incumbents through informal means.

This model of knowledge transfer at BPPA underscores critical vulnerabilities in institutional memory retention. Without formal handover systems, robust archiving protocols, or integrated digital and physical documentation strategies, the organization remains overly reliant on individual memory and interpersonal networks. For a public agency responsible for procurement—a function that demands transparency, consistency, and accountability—this lack of institutional memory threatens long-term efficiency and institutional learning.

6. Comparative Analysis of Institutional Memory Preservation in Civil Service

The table below presents a comparative overview of how selected countries—including Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, South Korea, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Philippines—approach the preservation and management of institutional memory within their public sectors. The comparison is based on key indicators such as the presence of legal frameworks, central archive authorities, digital recordkeeping policies, knowledge management strategies, and practices related to succession planning, metadata standards, and training initiatives. This analysis highlights both commonalities and gaps, offering insights into global practices and the potential for improvement in institutional memory systems.

Table 2 Comparative Analysis of Institutional Memory Preservation in Civil Service

SL	Indicators	Bangladesh	India	Malaysia	South Korea	Australia	United Kingdom	United States	Philippines
01	Specific Law on Public Records or Archives	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
		No dedicated Public Records Act. Directorate of Archives and Libraries Ordinance (1973) exists.	Public Records Act (1993) and Rules (1997).	National Archives Act 2003 (Act 629).	Public Records Management Act (2000).	Archives Act 1983.	Public Records Act 1958.	Federal Records Act of 1950 (amended).	National Archives Act (2007); Records Management Guidelines by NAP (2019).
02	Central Archive Authority	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
		National Archives under Directorate of Archives and Libraries.	National Archives of India (NAI).	National Archives of Malaysia.	National Archives of Korea.	National Archives of Australia (NAA).	The National Archives (TNA).	National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).	National Archives of the Philippines (NAP).
03	Digital Recordkeeping Policy/Platform	Partial	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial
		D-Nothi system in use; not fully integrated across all offices.	e-office initiative; uneven adoption.	e-Arkib, MyGovUC, and e-Gov digital initiatives.	Integrated systems like KONEPS and e-Gov platform.	Digital Continuity Policy 2020; Building Trust in the Public Record Policy.	Digital continuity through TNA and GKIM.	e-Gov policies and End of Term Archive initiatives.	DICT-led digital systems (iGovPhil); progress varies by agency.
04		No	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial

SL	Indicators	Bangladesh	India	Malaysia	South Korea	Australia	United Kingdom	United States	Philippines
	Knowledge Management (KM) Strategy or Blueprint	No National policy.	Implied through governance training; no single KM blueprint.	KM Blueprint for Public Sector (MAMPU, 2009).	Performance based KM in public service.	Metadata standards, KM embedded in agency frameworks.	Government Knowledge and Information Management (GKIM) profession.	Office of Management and Budget (OMB) circular A-30; KM in various agencies.	Mentioned in Philippine Development Plan (PDP); limited systematic implementation.
05	Mandated Handover or Succession Planning	No	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial
		No formal handover process or exit documentation policy.	Informal practices; not standardized across the civil service.	Exit Knowledge Transfer Program (EKTP), promoted in key ministries.	Succession notes and exit documentation are encouraged under the Public Service Acts.	Performance and transition policies in APS support knowledge transfer.	GKIM strategy includes handover procedures and succession guidance.	Some agencies require succession notes and transition files (e.g., FBI, EPA).	Recommended in training; not uniformly enforced across agencies.
06	Metadata Information Standard for Records	No	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial
		No formal metadata standard for records.	Department-level systems; a central metadata standard.	Records classification and digital tagging in e-Arkib.	Public Records Management System includes metadata frameworks.	Australian Government Recordkeeping Metadata Standard (AGRkMS).	GKIM-aligned standards; TNA provides metadata guidance.	National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) metadata and recordkeeping standards.	National Archives of the Philippines (NAP) guidelines provide classification; metadata practices are uneven.

SL	Indicators	Bangladesh	India	Malaysia	South Korea	Australia	United Kingdom	United States	Philippines
07	Exit Interviews or Knowledge Capture from Retiring Staff	No	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial
		Rare and informal; no institutionalized exit interview process.	Exit notes in some ministries; not systematized.	Practiced in ministries; part of the KM blueprint.	Structured exit notes and formal knowledge handover required.	Encouraged as part of performance and KM systems.	GKIM includes exit interviews and knowledge transfer mechanisms.	Practiced in many agencies (e.g., the Bureau of Prisons in the FBI).	Exit documentation suggested; uptake varies.
08	Institutionalized Training on Recordkeeping/KM	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
		BPATC includes training, not specialized in KM.	The National Academy of Administration includes recordkeeping modules.	The National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) offers KM training.	The National Human Resources Development Institute (NHI) provides extensive KM and leadership training.	Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) and National Archives of Australia (NAA) support information management training.	Civil Service Learning platform and GKIM training module.	Federal agencies conduct recordkeeping training (e.g., NARA).	The Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) include KM in public management programs.

7. Identifying Barriers to Institutional Memory Preservation

Several ongoing actions are being undertaken to modernize the institutional memory management mechanism within government institutions in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, systemic, technological, and cultural challenges continue to hinder effective implementation and continuity of the policies related to the modernization of institutional memory management. These obstacles are related to organizational behavior, staffing, infrastructure, and policy. This section will focus on the key findings related to the barriers to institutional memory preservation.

7.1. Understanding of the Concept of Institutional Memory

According to the majority of the respondents, one of the key fundamental issues is that most of the government officers do not clearly understand what "institutional memory" entails. Is it file management, policy continuity, or knowledge retention? This lack of conceptual ambiguity leads to inconsistent practices and underutilization of available systems. Institutional memory continues to be treated informally and haphazardly without adequate training and awareness.

7.2. Absence of Formal Documentation Culture

The absence of an official, institution-wide culture of documenting is one of the most common problems in institutional memory management. Officers frequently put more importance on finishing tasks right away than on documenting their procedures or choices for later use. Institutional archives become weak or incomplete as a result. This lack of infrastructure is a major obstacle to long-term document preservation."

A Director at the Department of Disaster Management pointed out this challenge candidly:

"There is a complete lack of knowledge management in the office... The same issue appears in multiple files, causing redundancy and confusion. In many cases, important decisions, discussions, or project details are never formally recorded. When documentation exists, it is often limited to letters and memos, with little emphasis on the logic behind decisions or the challenges encountered during implementation."

This lack of formal and structural mechanisms results in a patchy institutional memory where valuable knowledge is lost with each officer's departure.

7.3. Weak Record-Keeping and Archiving Practices

Findings reveal that the lack of dedicated personnel and a systematic, organized record room is a critical issue at both the ministry and upazila levels. Even when documents are stored, they are often unindexed, damaged, or inaccessible due to poor filing practices.

A former director of BPPA noted that,

“The rule is not strictly followed. Even the archive system faces challenges. If we simply list the documents and store them, who will be interested in retrieving them? How will someone find and use them effectively? If a system is not organized in a way that you can easily access it or find it using the catalog, retrieval becomes difficult. A contract was signed, and this approval came from the highest level of the government. However, when it came time to search for the approval document, it couldn't be found. The file itself is missing. There are many instances where old documents cannot be found. Some documents are even intentionally hidden.”

Such activities threaten accountability and openness in addition to delaying the daily operations of the government institutions. Public trust and policy continuity suffer when files go missing or are not recoverable during audits. A Senior Assistant Secretary from the Department of Secretariat, Cabinet Division, also commented on the issue by saying that,

“Government institutions are not adhering to the Secretariat’s rules for document storage. After six months or a year of commencing any work, it is often found that relevant documents related to the project are missing. This is due to a fragile and poorly designed document storage system that lacks a professional approach. No adequate training is provided to the officers and staff. Most officers and government employees show little interest in permanently storing documents. Also, Officers are often overwhelmed with daily tasks and minor duties, leaving them with little time to focus on important matters like document preservation. ”

Document preservation policies exist, but there is no enforcement. Some records meant for permanent storage are either lost or discarded due to negligence. Infrastructural development, law and regulatory mandates, as well as personal efficiency, are very weak in the institutional memory management system. Without standard operating procedures for archiving, those meant for permanent retention are mishandled, undermining the long-term memory of the institution.

7.4. Inadequate Digital Integration

The implementation and usability of platforms like D-Nothi and internal digital servers remain limited. Most of the government officers report that the decentralized system is not user-friendly, and its operational structure does not align with the decision-making culture in government institutions, which relies heavily on discussion and consensus. Moreover, technical limitations, inadequate access to ICT, lack of trained manpower, difficulties in uploading large files, lack of timely notifications, and inconsistent access (especially during fieldwork) further undermine the system's efficiency.

One of the directors of the BPPA shared that,

“Maintaining hard copies is effective and user-friendly for quick decision-making and internal discussions, but the digital system requires following specific formats, making discussions and decision-making more time-consuming. Many projects require discussions with different officers and stakeholders before decisions can be made. This becomes difficult when files must be approved through the D-Nothi system. The system often imposes strict time constraints, requiring files to be approved within a short window after being opened, which doesn't allow enough time for discussions.”

Also, a digital system for document management is not available at the local level, and a UNO from Gazipur Sadar admitted:

“The digital system, particularly D-Nothi, has not been fully implemented across all branches of the Upazila office. Its usage is partial and fragmented.”

Even so, D-Nothi is often only used for official compliance when the system is in place. Practical tasks like planning, correspondence, and decision-making are still done on paper. Officers are prohibited from using D-Nothi for larger files due to its technological limitations. Officers shift back to more conventional techniques that aren't tied to long-term digital storage as a result of these technological obstacles, which erode public confidence in the system. As a result, institutional memory is kept in physical files that are vulnerable to being misplaced, lost, or deteriorated.

7.5. Limited Collaboration and Information Sharing

The absence of a collaborative atmosphere in offices was another issue raised by officer. People frequently hesitate to divulge information or data, either out of a general unwillingness to take on the duties of their forebears or out of fear of being held accountable. Effective team-based knowledge management is hampered by this compartmentalized behavior, which also decreases transparency. An assistant Director from the Department of Social Services reflected that,

“There is no central database that can be accessed by all departments or that contains records for every department. If a centralized system existed containing records of employees’ transfer history and reasons for their transfer requests, decision-making would be more efficient. Currently, upon receiving an application, information about the concerned employee must be gathered either through direct communication with the respective sub-district office or by collecting hard copies from that office. However, transfers are often made based on state necessity or personal needs.”

When combined, these challenges weaken institutional knowledge's sustainability and result in ineffective government service delivery. To solve these, a coordinated approach incorporating cultural changes, digital infrastructure investment, legislative reform, and in-depth instruction on knowledge management concepts and methods will be required. However, redundancy and cloud storage aren't always supporting this. Information silos arise from the lack of a single knowledge management system, and infrastructure or low technical literacy frequently restrict access to digital resources. The wider

institutionalization of digital memory techniques has been hampered by cultural resistance to change and a lack of an approachable and cooperative framework.

7.6. Dependence on Manual Systems

Inadequate digital integration leads most offices to still rely heavily on manual recordkeeping, which is time-consuming and vulnerable to human error, redundancy, and misplacement. The same problem is frequently saved under several categories due to the absence of formalized mechanisms for organizing and referencing files, which causes confusion and redundancy. Furthermore, there aren't many infrastructure investments in digitization, and neither human nor financial resources are devoted to long-term digital preservation solutions. Also, some of the respondents suggest the hybrid system as they feel that both the digital and manual systems are useful for institutional memory management. One of the Upazila Social Service Officers reflected on their work and said,

“Most of the officials and staff are resistant to digital adoption. Manual staff members are often uncomfortable or unwilling to work with digital systems due to inadequate training and unfamiliarity. This slows down the full implementation and effectiveness of systems like D-Nothi”.

Dependence on a manual system creates over-reliance on individuals. Much of the institutional knowledge within Bangladesh's public sector is held by long-time office assistants, clerical personnel, or seasoned officers. Although this implicit knowledge is important, it is delicate and cannot be easily passed on. Relying on individuals instead of established systems introduces weaknesses. When these people depart or retire, the expertise they possess vanishes. Furthermore, unofficial methods of passing on knowledge do not have the precision and dependability of formally documented procedures. A Former Director General of BPPA noted with concern:

“The decision-making process of any government project is still in the mind of the person who made the decision. So, rather than spending all that time, people tend to make decisions based on the main points. But when the transfer occurs, the newly joined officer becomes confused and feels that the decision was not made correctly. If they knew the background, they would realize that the decision was

right. This illustrates the institutional failure to internalize and document valuable operational knowledge, leaving memory gaps that cannot be filled from archives alone.”

7.7. Lack of Structured Handover Mechanisms

The lack of official transfer protocols between departing and arriving police is one of the biggest obstacles. Officers frequently take on new duties without ever meeting their predecessors; thus, they must rely on subordinates or outdated record files to understand institutional procedures. Especially when officers are transferred during crucial project phases, this gap frequently leads to misunderstanding, delays in project execution, and loss of contextual knowledge.

One of the Deputy Secretaries shared,

“I had to immediately dive into my daily tasks while simultaneously reading through a large volume of record files to understand my new responsibilities. The workload was overwhelming, and the transition was much more difficult due to the lack of preparation time. My superior officer is often very busy due to other responsibilities, so it was challenging to get sufficient time for in-depth discussions about my tasks.”

7.8. Political Influence and Disruption

Another important yet delicate obstacle is the omission or lack of documentation regarding politically sensitive decisions. Shifts in political leadership can significantly threaten the preservation of institutional knowledge. Participants indicated that with governmental changes, documents may be eliminated or destroyed for political purposes, leading to the permanent loss of vital records. This fosters an atmosphere of doubt concerning document retention and increases mistrust in the consistency of archives. Consequently, many respondents tend to shy away from documenting decisions or their rationales when the matter is controversial, apprehensive of potential future consequences. A director from BPPA said:

“Political changes impact institutional memory management, with new governments sometimes removing documents based on political decisions, leading to the loss or erasure of important records.”

This practice of intentional silence obstructs accurate record-keeping and diminishes transparency. When officials intentionally leave documentation partial or unclear, it undermines the succeeding official's capacity to assess the rationale behind earlier choices or persist with policy execution. This obstacle is rooted in cultural and political factors rather than technology. Overcoming it requires comprehensive reforms and guarantees that officials will not face repercussions for upholding complete and transparent documentation.

7.9. Incentives and Recognition for Good Documentation

In many public organizations, record-keeping is not viewed as a measure of performance. Staff members are infrequently recognized for preserving archives, preparing handover documents, or systematically organizing files. In addition, support staff, who are essential for overseeing file management, lack the training and authority to establish consistent documentation practices. Their efforts are overlooked, and their valuable knowledge within the organization is not utilized in any structured manner.

A Deputy Director at the Department of Social Services pointed out:

“Documentation is not part of our appraisal system. As long as the current job is done, no one checks how well files are managed.”

This disincentive creates a culture where officers see record-keeping as a burden rather than a responsibility. Without formal recognition or career impact, there is little motivation to invest time in documenting institutional knowledge.

Findings also reflect that at the local level; the handling of institutional memory is even more inadequate. Local officers often view it as a short-term position. Additionally, there is a lack of personnel. Sustaining these systems demands more resources. It will be necessary for the government to allocate extra funds for this purpose. The availability of

a budget for this will be contingent upon a central decision. So, a pervasive lack of motivation and resistance to change within office culture impedes modernization efforts. Many office staff are not trained or incentivized to adopt new systems, and knowledge management is often viewed as an extra burden rather than an integral part of institutional effectiveness. Without a strong top-down push, the current organizational structure lacks the momentum to prioritize institutional memory preservation.

7.10. Staffing Shortages and Frequent Transfers

Most of the respondents pointed out that frequent staff transfers are a defining feature of Bangladesh's administrative system. Officers frequently occupy a position for only a few months or a couple of years before being reassigned. There is a persistent lack of designated personnel tasked with memory management, and those in such positions often undergo frequent relocations. This disrupts institutional continuity, as new officers are required to start anew in understanding file systems and their organizational roles. In certain offices, even designated personnel confessed they lacked clarity regarding their responsibilities and received no formal orientation when taking over their roles.

A UNO emphasized the practical consequences of such practices:

"In many cases, outgoing officials do not leave comprehensive handover notes or documentation, making it difficult for successors to follow up on previous work."

When successors arrive, they often inherit files with little contextual information. As a result, they must rely on support staff or retrace earlier steps, leading to duplication of work and inefficiency.

A Deputy Director from the Department of Land Records and Surveys said that:

"There is no formal handover system. The new officer must begin from scratch or call the previous officer to understand the work in progress."

Without mandated handover formats or release note systems, knowledge transfer becomes informal and inconsistent, weakening institutional memory with each transition. Officers often face intense pressure when joining a new workstation without prior preparation or sufficient briefing.

According to most of the respondents, the lack of contextual knowledge and variation in office culture can make it difficult to adapt quickly, especially when project deadlines are tight. In many cases, official handovers do not take place. Officers, especially UNOs and other field-level administrators, are frequently transferred without a proper knowledge-sharing session, leading to gaps in continuity and understanding. The reliance on reviewing record files independently to grasp project history remains a norm.

8. Future Strategies for Institutional Memory Preservation

Institutional memory—the accumulated body of knowledge, practices, and organizational history—is essential for ensuring continuity, improving policy implementation, and avoiding the repetition of past mistakes. However, as revealed through process tracing and empirical field research across institutions like BPPA, DLRS, DSS, DDM, local offices (e.g., Gazipur Sadar Upazila) significant gaps exist in preserving and transferring this memory. Informal handovers, dependence on tacit knowledge, co-workers, and long-serving support staff, lack of standardized documentation, and limited digital capacity have collectively undermined institutional memory retention. To overcome these barriers, a suite of forward-looking strategies must be adopted.

8.1. Develop and Enforce a National Knowledge Management Policy

A foundational step toward preserving institutional memory is the development of a comprehensive National Knowledge Management Policy (KMP). This policy should be spearheaded by the Ministry of Public Administration in collaboration with the Cabinet Division, with input from relevant departments that have pioneered internal archiving systems.

The policy should mandate:

- Structured handover processes (e.g., formal “Succession Notes”)
- Documentation standards (e.g., templates for project updates, decision logs)
- Categorized record-keeping (short-, medium-, and long-term documents)
- Digital backup protocols
- Periodic audits of documentation quality

Such institutionalization will shift knowledge retention from a discretionary activity to a mandatory administrative obligation, enhancing organizational learning and resilience.

8.2. Institutionalize Succession Planning and Handover Notes

One of the most widely observed gaps is the absence of formal handover practices during government officer transfers. Every officer, regardless of level or post, should be required to produce a succession handover note before leaving a station or post. This note should include:

- Project status and deliverables
- Pending decisions and deadlines
- Contextual notes on stakeholders and internal dynamics
- Critical files and their locations (digital and physical)

These notes must be uploaded to a centralized digital succession archive, accessible to both successors and senior administrators. This simple yet structured approach can drastically reduce the time new officers spend understanding their roles and can prevent repeated mistakes.

8.3. Strengthen and Decentralize Digital Infrastructure

Digital platforms such as D-Nothi have been instrumental in modernizing public sector record-keeping. However, their effectiveness is uneven, especially in field offices. Therefore, Bangladesh must:

- Improve server capacity and internet connectivity at the upazila and district levels
- Enable offline access with sync functionality
- Appoint dedicated IT officers at subnational levels
- Establish regional digital knowledge hubs that feed into a national institutional memory system

By decentralizing digital capacity, the government can reduce its overdependence on physical files and enable seamless documentation and knowledge access even in remote areas.

8.4. Embed Documentation in Performance Evaluation

Documentation must be redefined from an optional clerical activity to a core element of officer performance. As part of the Annual Performance Agreements (APA) and promotion criteria, officers should be assessed on their:

- Quality of record-keeping
- Compliance with handover protocols
- Contributions to institutional memory systems (e.g., uploading reports, maintaining logs)

Performance-based incentives can transform documentation from a neglected task into a professional priority. Internal audits and peer reviews can reinforce this norm while discouraging negligence in preserving public records.

8.5. Expand Training on Documentation and Knowledge Management

Skill-building is essential for sustaining knowledge retention systems. Officers and support staff alike should receive regular training on:

- Digital documentation and file archiving
- Writing effective handover notes
- Metadata tagging and search optimization
- Filing systems (both digital and physical)

Training modules should be integrated into the BCS Foundation Course, ACAD, Local Government Training Institutes (LGTIs), and project-specific induction programs. Such structured training will reduce errors, misclassification, and the informal reliance on personal memory.

8.6. Promote, Reward, and Scale Local Innovations

Despite institutional challenges, many grassroots innovations have emerged—especially at the upazila level. Officers have introduced:

- Virtual databases using Excel
- SOPs for recurring administrative functions

- Scanned and indexed archives using low-cost tools

These practices should be documented, evaluated, and scaled nationally. A Knowledge Innovation Portal can be developed to showcase best practices, case studies, and templates. Recognition through awards or promotions can also motivate more local experimentation in preserving institutional memory.

8.7. Establish a Central Institutional Memory and Knowledge Management Cell

To ensure consistent application and monitoring, a dedicated cell under the Cabinet Division or the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) should be formed. This unit would:

- Maintain the national archive of handover notes, SOPs, and institutional reports
- Develop templates and guidelines for all departments
- Conduct annual reviews of documentation quality
- Coordinate cross-ministerial training and digitization drives
- Host a secure Knowledge Management Platform (KMP) for inter-ministerial access

Such central coordination will prevent fragmentation, reduce redundancy, and ensure that institutional knowledge is accessible and secure across administrations.

9. Conclusion

Institutional memory is not just about storing files—it is about ensuring continuity of service, policy coherence, and knowledge transfer across time and personnel. These recommendations aim to create a future-ready public administration system that balances technology, human insight, and organizational learning to build resilient institutions.

Institutional memory in government offices is vital for preserving continuity, maintaining efficiency, and supporting effective governance. Bangladesh has made notable progress, particularly in public procurement. However, challenges such as manual processes, low

motivation for digital adoption, and a lack of structured handover mechanisms persist across many departments.

A coordinated strategy that combines policy reforms, technological upgrades, training, and cultural transformation is essential to create a robust institutional memory system in the public sector. With proper implementation, such reforms can enhance service delivery, reduce redundancy, and improve long-term governance outcomes.

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Annex

Interview Checklist



Interview Checklist: Institutional Memory in the Bangladesh Civil Service

Interview Checklist

1. Understanding Existing Practices

- What are the current strategies (how do you accumulate, store, and transfer)used to preserve institutional memory in your organization? (formal structure) Strengths and weaknesses of the current practice.
- How are knowledge retention (preservation and maintenance) and transfer managed in your department?
- What tools or mechanisms (e.g., documentation, digital systems) are in place to store institutional knowledge?
- How do new employees gain access to historical knowledge and past experiences?
- Are there formal mentoring or knowledge-sharing programs for new recruits?
- How does the institutional memory/knowledge/historical knowledge help the official/recruits? Is it helpful and effective what do you think?

2. Documenting Knowledge Retention Strategies

- What methods are used to document and archive institutional knowledge (e.g., reports, manuals, digital databases)? Do you think that existing methods are useful? Do you have any suggestions regarding this?
- How are these documents updated, accessed, and maintained?
- Who is responsible for maintaining institutional records?

- Are there any internal policies guiding knowledge preservation and transfer?
- Data safety and risk

3. Identifying Barriers to Institutional Memory Preservation

- What challenges do you face in preserving institutional memory?
- How does frequent personnel turnover impact knowledge retention?
- Have you experienced knowledge loss due to retirements, transfers, or political changes?
- Are there cultural or structural barriers that prevent knowledge-sharing?
- How do the workload or bureaucratic processes impact documentation and memory retention?
- How do different organizational culture helps and create barriers in institutional memory management?

4. Process Tracing of Knowledge Transfer

- Can you describe the typical process of knowledge transfer when an employee leaves?
- Are there formal exit interviews or knowledge handover procedures?
- How effective are the existing knowledge transfer methods?
- Have you encountered cases where a lack of institutional memory caused inefficiencies or errors? Also, do you get any advantage of having the right information and historical knowledge?

5. International Best Practices

- Are you aware of any knowledge management practices used in other countries? And you think that is a better practice.
- Have you received training or exposure to best practices in preserving institutional memory?
- What improvements can be made by adopting international strategies?

6. Comparative Understanding & Future Strategies

- How do you think the private sector handles knowledge management differently?
Is it possible to adopt some of their practices in government institutes?
- Is there any government institute that handles knowledge management differently? And which is very effective?
- What changes or innovations would help improve knowledge retention in your organization?
- What role can technology play in improving institutional memory?
- How can policymakers support better knowledge management in civil service?
- What recommendations do you have to strengthen institutional memory in the Bangladesh Civil Service?

Bangla Interview Checklist



Interview Checklist: Institutional Memory in the Bangladesh Civil Service

Interview Checklist

1. Understanding Existing Practices

- আপনার প্রতিষ্ঠানে Institutional Memory সংরক্ষণের জন্য বর্তমান কি ধরনের পদ্ধতি এবং কৌশল অনুসরণ করা হয়?
- আপনার প্রতিষ্ঠানে তথ্য সংগ্রহ, সংরক্ষণ এবং স্থানান্তর কিভাবে করা হয়?
- Institutional knowledge সংরক্ষণ করার জন্য কোন tools বা software (যেমন, ডকুমেন্টেশন, ডিজিটাল সিস্টেম, ই-নথি) রয়েছে?
- নতুন নিয়োগ প্রাপ্ত কর্মকর্তারা কীভাবে পূর্ববর্তী Institutional knowledge এবং তথ্যের access পেয়ে থাকে?
- নতুন নিয়োগ প্রাপ্ত কর্মকর্তাদের জন্য কোন আনুষ্ঠানিক পরামর্শদান বা Knowledge Shearing প্রোগ্রাম আছে কি?

2. Documenting Knowledge Retention Strategies

- Institutional Memory ও তথ্য (যেমন, রিপোর্ট, ম্যানুয়াল, ডিজিটাল ডাটাবেস) নথিভুক্ত এবং সংরক্ষণ করতে কোন পদ্ধতি ব্যবহার করা হয়?
- কীভাবে এই নথি সমূহ আপডেট, অ্যাক্সেস এবং রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ করা হয়?
- Institutional knowledge/record রক্ষণাবেক্ষণের দায়িত্বে কে আছেন?
- Institutional knowledge এবং তথ্য সংরক্ষণ এবং স্থানান্তর জন্য কোন অভ্যন্তরীণ নীতিমালা আছে কি?

3. Identifying Barriers to Institutional Memory Preservation

- Institutional Memory সংরক্ষণের ক্ষেত্রে আপনি/ আপনার প্রতিষ্ঠান কি ধরনের চ্যালেঞ্জের মুখোমুখি হয়ে থাকেন?
- কিভাবে কর্মীদের টার্নওভার Institutional Memory ব্যবস্থাপনাকে প্রভাবিত করে?
- কর্মকর্তাদের অবসর, বদলি বা রাজনৈতিক পট পরিবর্তনের মত ঘটনা Institutional Memory ব্যবস্থাপনাকে কীভাবে প্রভাবিত করে? উল্লেখিত কারণে কখনো Institutional Memory এবং তথ্য বিলুপ্তি/ হারিয়েছে কি?
- এমন কোন সাংস্কৃতিক বা কাঠামোগত প্রতিবন্ধকতা আছে কি যা Institutional Memory এবং তথ্য-আদান-প্রদানের ক্ষেত্রে প্রতিবন্ধকতা তৈরি করে?
- কিভাবে কাজের চাপ বা আমলাতান্ত্রিক প্রক্রিয়া ডকুমেন্টেশন এবং Institutional Memory সংরক্ষণকে প্রভাবিত করে?

4. Process Tracing of Knowledge Transfer

- একজন কর্মকর্তা চলে গেলে (বদলি, অবসর) কি প্রক্রিয়ায় তথ্য স্থানান্তর করা হয় সে সম্পর্কে বিস্তারিত বলবেন কি?
- দায়িত্ব হস্তান্তরের আনুষ্ঠানিক কোন প্রক্রিয়া আছে কি? আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে কোন বিদায়ী / প্রস্থান সাক্ষাৎকার অনুষ্ঠিত হয় কি? দায়িত্ব হস্তান্তর প্রক্রিয়ায় সম্পর্কে বিস্তারিত বলুন।
- বিদ্যমান তথ্য এবং দায়িত্ব স্থানান্তর পদ্ধতি কতটা কার্যকর বলে আপনি মনে করেন?
- আপনি কি এমন কোন ঘটনার সম্মুখীন হয়েছেন যেখানে Institutional Memory এবং প্রয়োজনীয় তথ্যের অভাবে আপনাকে সমস্যার সম্মুখীন হতে হয়েছে এবং যার ফলে আপনার কাজে ব্যাঘাত ঘটেছে, বা কোন কাজে ত্রুটি হয়েছে?

5. International Best Practice

- অন্যান্য দেশের তথ্য এবং Institutional memory ব্যবস্থাপনা সম্পর্কে আপনার মতামত কি?
- আপনি কি Institutional memory সংরক্ষণ এবং প্রতিষ্ঠানিক তথ্য ব্যবস্থাপনা বিষয়ে কোন প্রশিক্ষণ বা এক্সপোজার পেয়েছেন?
- Institutional memory সংরক্ষণ এবং প্রতিষ্ঠানিক তথ্য ব্যবস্থাপনার ক্ষেত্রে আন্তর্জাতিক ভাবে অনুশীলন করা হয় এমন কোন পদ্ধতি অনুসরণ করে আমাদের দেশের Institutional memory সংরক্ষণ ও ব্যবস্থাপনা পদ্ধতি আরো উন্নত করা যেতে পারে কি? এই বিষয়ে আপনার মতামত কি?

6. Comparative Understanding & Future Strategies

- বেসরকারি খাতের Institutional memory সংরক্ষণ এবং প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক তথ্য ব্যবস্থাপনা পদ্ধতি সম্পর্কে আপনার মতামত কি? তারা কি ভিন্ন এবং অধিক কার্যকরী কোন পদ্ধতি অনুসরণ করে?
- বেসরকারি খাতের Institutional memory সংরক্ষণ এবং তথ্য ব্যবস্থাপনা পদ্ধতি সরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠানের Institutional memory সংরক্ষণ এবং তথ্য ব্যবস্থাপনার ক্ষেত্রে অনুসরণ করা সম্ভব কি?
- সরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠানের Institutional memory সংরক্ষণ এবং তথ্য ব্যবস্থাপনার প্রক্রিয়া কীভাবে আরও উন্নত এবং কার্যকরী করা যেতে পারে, এই ব্যাপারে আপনার পরামর্শ কি?
- সরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠানের Institutional memory সংরক্ষণ এবং তথ্য ব্যবস্থাপনা প্রক্রিয়ায় প্রযুক্তির ব্যবহার কী ধরনের ভূমিকা পালন করে বলে আপনি মনে করেন?
- সিভিল সার্ভিসে Institutional memory সংরক্ষণ এবং তথ্য ব্যবস্থাপনা প্রক্রিয়া আরও উন্নত করার ব্যাপারে নীতিনির্ধারক গন কীভাবে সহযোগিতা করতে পারেন?
- বাংলাদেশের সিভিল সার্ভিসে Institutional memory সংরক্ষণ এবং তথ্য ব্যবস্থাপনার প্রক্রিয়া আরও উন্নত এবং কার্যকরী করার জন্য আপনার আর কোন সুপারিশ আছে কি?