



CONTEMPORARY OFFICE MANAGEMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, IBADAN, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The office plays a very important role in the efficiency of an organisation. The effectiveness of these functions depends largely on the availability, the needed competencies and skills acquired by the secretary in the Modern Office Practice. This study examines the effects of contemporary office management in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The exploratory research techniques were adopted which include reviewing available literature and/or data. Informal qualitative approaches, such as discussions with consumers, employees, management or competitors were employed. The availability and use of modern office equipment will inevitably have an impact on the activities and output of the Secretary of the Offices and the University. The availability of office equipment and knowledge in the use of office equipment at the University of Ibadan is investigated in terms of their effect on office output. The study therefore recommends that training in the use of office equipment be stepped up in order to increase the level of knowledge and output of the secretaries. The study thus recommends that training programmes on the use of modern office equipment for secretaries should be embarked upon.*

KEYWORDS: Modern office, Technology, Secretary, University of Ibadan

INTRODUCTION

In the past decades several changes have taken place in private and public offices regarding the roles and functions of the office management due to fast technological advancement in all phases of human life, especially in the office environment. Most offices in today's business world, be it government, industry or other human endeavours, require facts and accurate information for quick decision-making. The office worker expects certain support from the organisation that he/she is employed. This support can be technological (machines and equipment) and human. In the past, managers dictated memos and letters and secretaries typed them in various offices. Most recently, institutions have developed word processing centers and relied on personal computers and even electronic mail in an effort to lessen the need for secretarial support and make the secretary very productive (Ezoem, 1995; Osuala, 2004). The type of machines and gadgets that were used to produce, duplicate and store information has undergone a great transformation to cope with the growing world technology; as a result, the system of office management in the business set up has changed tremendously from that of typewriting, shorthand dictation, answering of telephone calls and processing of mails to the usage of computers and other modern gadgets (Mumuni & Sam 2014).

Today's office managers are exposed to office technology including the internet that makes work much easier and knowledge more accessible (Edwin, 2008). It is now easier to send messages by telex, electronic mails (e-mails), fax and telephones. Other office gadgets



available for office management are photo-copy machines, duplicating machines, dictating machines, printers, among others. In managing an office, many technologically advanced office gadgets are available to ease their jobs and enhance proficiency and productivity leading to improved access to goods and services globally (Akpomi, 2003). Technological changes have altered the procedures and techniques for office functions to include the computers, electronic mail, voice mail, and the internet.

Spencer (1981) defined automation as the process of replacing human work with work done by machines or systems designed to perform a specific combination of action automatically or repeatedly. However, in recent times, the routine function of office management has reached an advanced stage due to the invention of automated office equipment. Most of the traditional and routine tasks are performed by automated office equipment such as computers, telephone among others. The efficiency and effectiveness of the office management in every organisation such as University of Ibadan depends on the availability of office technologies as well as the skills and competencies of the office managers (Ordu & Akpomi 2009). Modern organisations have come to appreciate the role and importance of the secretary as well as the need to provide the requisite and necessary office machines and equipment for the efficiency of the secretarial functions.

Key Issue

Office managers are an integral part of the organisation. They are the wheel upon which the activities of the office rotate. Information passes across them every minute. As a result it behooves them to acquire the skills and competence for modern information processing by taking the advantages which new technology has provided. In spite of the huge opportunities presented by technology, organisations are without modern equipment as a result of management's lack of support in the acquisition of modern equipment. The office managers on the other hand, seem to exhibit conservative attitudes by dragging feet in personal development of acquiring skills needed for modern organisation. New technology which has to do with the utilization of computer systems and software, and other internet facilities in service delivery seems to have presented some huge challenges to the secretaries. This is why the study was conducted to investigate the challenges facing secretaries in utilizing new technology in selected public organisations.

The Concept of Information Technology

In 1995, information technology was defined as computer software and hardware solutions that provide support of management, operations, and strategists in organisations (Thong & Yap 1995). Thong and Yap (1995) state that the goal of having information technology (with all computer applications like MRP/EDI, CAM/CAD) is increasing productivity of cooperation. Two years later, Boar (1997) defines information technology as "those technologies engaged in the operation, collection, transport, retrieving, storage, access presentation, and transformation of information in all its forms..." Also, information technology could be regarded as a technological aspect of systems of information as it is reported by Hollander et al (1999), information technology is aimed for creation of computer-based systems of information by using computer system in an organisation (Sarosa & Zowghi, 2003).

Moreover, with regard to the term of business relationships, in 2002, Carr & Smeltzer (2002) explained information technology as the use of automated purchasing systems, supplier links



through electronic data interchange, computer-to-computer links with key suppliers and finally systems of information. One year later, in a study by Sarosa & Zowghi (2003) on information technology in Indonesia, information technology was explained as “all the technology that is used by an organisation to collect, process, and disseminate information in all its form. Therefore, the component of information technology will include hardware (scanner, printer, computer, etc), software (operating systems, application development language, office application, etc.), and” According to another scholar (Attaran 2003), “Information technology is defined as capabilities offered to organisations by computers, software applications, and telecommunications to deliver data, information, and knowledge to individuals and processes”. Besides that, information technology can be defined as recently it is stated by Tan et al. (2009) as application of Information and Communication Technologies tools including computer network, software and hardware required for internet connection.

Based on this review and aligned with aforementioned views, term information technology will cover a wide range of information processing and computer application in organisations. It will cover systems of information, Internet, information and communication related technologies, and their infrastructure including computer softwares, networks and hardwares, which process or transmit information to enhance the effectiveness of individuals and organisations. However, information technology also includes any computer application and required packages of hardwares, Computer Aided Manufacturing, Computer Aided Design, Electronic Data Interchange and Enterprise Resource planning that positively affect the productivity of cooperation.

The Concept of Office Management

Management is the key to success for any organisation; it is universally applied in all fields of organized human activity. Therefore, office management is an integral part of the total management of the organisation. It provides centralized guidance, which diverts the individual efforts towards a common goal or objectives.

Every office, therefore, requires making decisions, coordinating activities, handling personnel and conducting evaluation of performance directed toward the objectives. Office activities are also come on by a group of people (office personnel) working with appropriate means (tools and equipment) and under suitable environment for a common objective or purpose - that of providing efficient and economical clerical service to the organisation. It is the function of Office Management to organize, guide and control the activities of the office personnel to achieve these common objectives. That is why Office Management has been defined as the art of guiding the personnel of the office in the use of means appropriate to its environment in order to achieve its specific purpose.

Functions of Office Management

When office management has to be implemented in an operative manner, there are certain functions that need to be taken into consideration and these have been stated as follows: (Office Management and Modern Office and its Functions, n.d.).

Planning – Planning is concerned with dealing in advance what is to be done; it is the first fundamental function of management. It makes provision of the instructions and courses of action that are required by the managers in order to achieve the goals. Planning is the selecting and relating of facts, and making and using the assumptions regarding the future in the



conception and devising of activities that are required to achieve the desired goals and objectives.

Organising – Organising is the process of combining the works done by the individuals or a group to perform the facilities that are required by the personnel to achieve the desired objectives. The duties performed by the individuals make provision of the passage for the resourceful, logical, constructive and synchronized application of the available determinations.

Staffing – The function of staffing within an organisation refers to the recruitment of the individuals into various jobs and positions in accordance with their qualifications, skills and capabilities. When the employees are recruited, for a certain period of time, they are given training about the organisation, its objectives and the job functions, which they are required to perform. Therefore, staffing refers to the methods of selection, recruitment, training, development, promotion and remuneration of employees.

Directing – The function of directing refers to the manners and ways in which the superiors and the employers make provision of directions to their subordinates. Their main objective is to lead them towards the right path. It includes leadership, communication and supervision. Leadership is the ability to influence the individuals to endeavour enthusiastically for the realization of mutual objectives. Communication is the process of transferring information from one person to the other person; there are various means of communication such as oral, written, and the usage of technological devices to communicate. It includes speaking, listening and responding. The function of supervision also comes under directing. It includes attempts to bring about conventionality between the planned and the actual outcomes.

Motivating – Motivating is the process of stimulating the individual to take action in order to bring about the satisfaction of the requirements and the accomplishment of the desired objectives. The process of motivation moves an individual to perform, work and to take action. This can be done either by the use of power or force. Strictness is also sometimes adopted by the employers or the superiors in order to motivate their subordinates. The provision of inducements, benefits and incentives is another way to motivate the employees; when they are offered benefits, then they get motivated to work and satisfying the needs of the employees is another way to motivate them towards the achievement of the desired objectives.

Co-ordinating – It means monitoring, balancing and keeping the team together by ensuring the suitable allocation of tasks and works to various members in accordance to their skills and abilities. Under this function, it is also important to make sure that tasks are performed with an opinion amongst the members themselves. There should be a synchronization amongst the workforce employed within an organisation.

Organisational Structure in University of Ibadan

Effective policy implementation requires University administration to consider, number of factors including how the organisation should be structured to put the policy into effect. Since all policies are to be implemented by the employees of the university organisation in one form, or another, the structure of the university organisation defines the positions and the role of employees at various levels with regard to such implementation. Organisational structure involves arrangement of activities and assignment of personnel to these activities in order to achieve the organisational goals in an efficient manner. It is a way by which various parts of a university organisation are tied together in a coordinated manner and it illustrates the various



relationships among various functions of university administration. In general, “organisational structure” refers to the way individuals and groups are arranged with respect to the task they perform.

A good university organisational structure is needed so that:

1. Each individual employee in the administration is assigned a role, responsibility and necessary authority. Each person who is assigned to an activity must know his position, his role and his relationship with others. He is further responsible for efficient execution of his role and his duties and is given the authority to do so.
2. The activities for all individual employees are coordinated and integrated into a common factor in order to achieve the university objectives. Organisation is needed for the purpose of integration of diverse activity in a cohesive manner.
3. The optimal use of an employee's skill and efforts is achieved. It is said that half of the work is done when you know what you have to do and how you have to do it. Well-structured university administrations assign the right person to the right job and this avoids misapplication. The importance of an appropriate university administration’s “organisational structure” is, thus, obvious. There is a viewpoint that there should be a close relationship between responsibility and authority of the university.

The organisational structure of the University of Ibadan has resulted in the establishment of various offices. Over time, there have been changes in the management of offices in the University of Ibadan. The aim of this paper is to look at the potentiality and challenges of contemporary Information Technology for office management in the University of Ibadan.

Contemporary Information Technology for Office Management in University of Ibadan

The first thing to take into consideration is that as technology advances, it becomes more complex. For example, a person who grew up using old computers and software will have difficulties using modern technologies. In this case, University of Ibadan has to provide training to make a worker familiar with modern technologies. Training benefits the organisation because employees and managers will gain skills that can help them to use technology in a way that will result in the best outcome for the organisation.

a. Training

Every organisation should be able to measure the benefit of training, by ensuring that the cost does not exceed the value. Alan (2010), in his research on the value of technical training, mentions that the value lies within a manager and his team. Collective vision, knowledge and skills sets have a wider impact than any technology. The training and development function is becoming increasingly important to have in business, because managers need to be prepared to use technology to the extent that it benefits their organisation. Rees and Porter (2008) affirmed that training and development has always been an issue that organisations need to take seriously and, if organised effectively, should be viewed as an essential investment and not an avoidable cost. This is because training and development is a way of ensuring that employees perform toward the approved standards and avoid performing toward the required standards.



It can therefore be stated that office training has the potentiality of ensuring employees' performance in the University of Ibadan towards approved standards and performing toward the required standards.

b. Managing Technology

A second factor is how technology in the university is managed. All organisational tasks should be properly managed in order for the technology to work as intended. Technologies need to be managed; otherwise, users might use them for purposes that do not benefit the organisation.

Management of technology is needed to show users what they are expected to use technology for, how to use it, and to monitor the effectiveness of technology in relation to business productivity. Lynda (2003) defined managing technology as the integrated planning, design, optimization, operation and control of technological products, processes and services. The use of technology for human advantage, and the process of managing technology in organisations are getting more complex as they become more important.

In the early years, the big job was to manage the technology (getting it to work, keeping it running, and, thus, reducing the running cost). However, as technology has advanced, the main thrust was to manage the information resource of the organisation; particularly, to support management decision making by delivering information when and where it was needed (Applegate et al., 2003). Today, the changes required to support new technologies and organisational structures that are now emerging, require a significant amount of well-coordinated business and IT executive leadership (Melville et al., 2004). Managing technology has become a very important element of the university system. Through upgrading and adopting technology-based solutions, University of Ibadan has been able to move from analogue to digital stage. Even though adopting the use of modern technology is not reflected in every office procedure in the university as there are still traces of analogue instruments in some of the office activities carried out in the institution.

c. Networking/communication

Mobile technology allows continuous interaction among employees, managers and customers, because mobile technologies like smartphones and tablets allow people to connect with each other through social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Skype and Twitter. This kind of communication is very important in businesses, because it delivers benefits such as the efficient use of staff time, improved customer service, and a greater range of products and services delivered.

Although, the University of Ibadan is one of the highly ranked universities in the world due to its webometrics ranking. This can be related to the university networking. The university has been able to adopt modern networking and communication tools to promote her activities. This is to ensure interaction with the staff (teaching and non-teaching), students and associates of the university. The adaptation of modern technology has resulted in buoyancies experienced in the networking and communication activities of the university.

d. Promotion

Mobile technology has introduced a new dimension to advertising and promoting the institution worldwide (Haghirian et al., 2005). The university uses mobile technology to advertise to a



greater number of users of mobile technology. People now see advertisements on mobile phones through a variety of mobile promotion technologies, including SMS (text) messaging, mobile websites and mobile applications.

University of Ibadan is one of the most promoted schools in Nigeria, which have given them a unique national and global image over the years. The university has adopted recent technologies to create value for herself. Modern technology has been an efficient tool in promoting the university.

e. Usefulness of office technology

The fourth factor that influences managers' performance is the usefulness of office technology. The change that office technologies brings to the organisation depends on how useful they are. For example, telephones and computers are more useful than a paper shredder and electric sharpener. This means that managers under a tight budget will have to buy a telephone and a computer because they can benefit more from these gadgets.

However, this does not mean that other gadgets with less benefits will not increase the performance of managers; benefits will vary with how useful office technologies become. Billhif (2006) asserts that, if technologies are useful, they will tend to be used every day. The University of Ibadan has found modern technology to be useful and this can be seen from how the university has used these instruments for their greater advantage.

Challenges of Contemporary Information Technology for Office Management in University of Ibadan

Despite the huge benefits presented by new technologies in the University of Ibadan, secretaries are still facing some challenges in the performance of their duties. The challenges are:

1. Inadequate or lack of modern facilities and equipment: Otobo and Makeri- Yahaya (2002) argued that the automated office uses sophisticated equipment which provides information faster. Nevertheless, it is expensive, making public organisations to provide few while using other obsolete machines to complement the effort of the secretary.
2. Constant power failure: Technological equipment used includes computers, projectors, scanners, printers, smart phones etc. These cannot be utilized without power supply. Constant power supply is therefore needed for the secretary to effectively perform and utilize the benefits of those technologies. Buttressing this, Umar (2009) asserted that electricity power has been erratic to allow for proper functioning of equipment in Nigeria.
3. Lack of funds: Grace (2014) identified lack of funds to be another challenge affecting the acquisition of new technology equipment in some public offices, thereby impoverishing the office of the secretary for lack of equipment.
4. Lack of training and retraining: Lack of training of secretaries has become very difficult in the name of lack of funds. The inability of any organisation to send their secretaries on training will hamper the acquisition of new skills and competencies needed for the operation of modern equipment. The invention of new technologies therefore calls for acquisition of new skills. As a result, training and retraining of secretaries is key to the utilization of new technologies.



5. Poor knowledge of new technologies: According to Olukemi and Boluwaji (2014), the design of OTM programme components appears to be responsive to a global initiative with an objective that portends new academic direction in favour of ICT. The objectives, theoretical and practical contents of the new curriculum are geared towards integrating graduates of OTM into the evolution of technology. Poor knowledge of utilizing new technologies in teaching could affect efficient acquisition and of modern utilization of new technologies by students who in turn graduate to be secretaries. Onwukwe and Aliche (2012) asserted that lecturers are duty bound to help students acquire and develop needed skills and attitudes for employment by aligning curriculum with practice. The lack of those skills could also affect effective acquisition and utilization of new technologies which may render the secretary unemployable.

CONCLUSION

The availability and use of modern office equipment will inevitably affect the activities and output of the secretary in offices and the University. The availability of office equipment and knowledge in the use of office equipment in the University of Ibadan is investigated vis-a-vis their effect on output in the office. The study thus recommends that training in the use of office equipment be intensified to increase the knowledge level of secretaries and subsequently their output.

The Nigerian environment faces two challenges in the information and communication field, namely; provision of access to an enhanced participation in economic life, and coping with the challenges of rapidly advancing technology. A few problems continue to block the potential of information technology in Nigeria. The major problems are a lack of knowledge of what is available in the IT field, non-availability of relevant information to the country and a shortage of resources to acquire current technology. Licensing agreements and network restrictions also contributes to low penetration of information technology in the country. This paper focuses on the prospects of information technology in Nigeria in the wake of the information society.

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