

Information Technology and Office Management: Prospects and Challenges for Students in Tertiary Institution in Nigeria.

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Abstract

The current trend in Office Management has made Information technology indispensable in this modern age. Though, new innovations and technologies are being introduced on daily basis, there are still certain challenges that are being faced in Nigeria and generally, the developing countries, in the course of coping with the global demand. Also, considering the expectations required of students studying Office Technology Management in tertiary institutions by the larger society. There is the need for a review paper that will bring to fore the various prospects of IT and challenges in Office management.

1. Introduction

Technology has introduced a new dimension to various fields of human endeavour. This fact has been greatly acknowledged by some scholars that have researched into the concept. In the opinion of Gore and Leuwerke (2000:3), 'It is impossible to deny the profound impact of emerging technologies on the lives of people in today's society. In the last 2 decades, computers have changed the way we live, work, and communicate. One need only mention the concern surrounding Y2K to portray the extent of our society's dependence on computers.' Information is an essential strategic resource in any nation for the various aspects of development in the world today. Zi-guang (1992:210) submits that:

We are living in an era of information explosion. According to estimates, some 4 to 5 million new documents are published every year. Only by utilizing modern information technology can we promptly and scientifically collect, collate and process so many documents.'

A major aspect of the work of Office Technology and Management students and lecturers is Office Management. In the past, the course is referred to as Secretariat Studies. The course has only changed in nomenclature and not in scope. Professionals in the field are regarded as secretaries, confidential secretaries, executive secretaries and the likes.

Before the advent of Information Technology (IT), professionals in the field of Office Technology Management deal a lot with paper work and the typewriter serves as the working tool. In recent time, IT has introduced a new dimension to the field through computer and other electronic devices that give the profession a day to day transformation as Blanton et al (1998) posit that these new computer technologies have changed the way we engage in common activities. No wonder, this means of information is modernised on daily basis to meet the demands of the current tendencies in the technical undertakings of the world. No doubt, secretaries are the custodian of information in any organisation. In any organization, the numerous roles that the secretary performs are too important to be underemphasized.

The role of technology in the field of education can never be over emphasized. Students have become a major beneficiary of the technology especially in management of information. Jorn and Duin (1992:18) observe that 'when students meet face to face, technology can still provide them with physical space to share information and engage in substantive conflict. When collaborators are at different locations and cannot meet face –to-face, technologies allow collaborators to share information and discuss issues' In essence, technology is helpful in bridging information gap when essential and in creating information gap when needed. But to VanHoof et al (1996), technology has assisted to enhance operational effectiveness and to enhance customer satisfaction with the property in the hospitality Industry.

The increasing penetration of IT into office management has been accompanied by certain prospects and challenges which deserve to be given scholarly attention. Though, Harvey and Sturges (2010:148) agree that 'Information and communication technologies (now widely regarded as IT) can have a positive influence, but it has to be the right technology for the right place and the right people.' This is the more reason that more awareness is needed in the application of IT to different fields. It is important to state that the approach of IT to classroom teaching is different from office practice.

The primary purpose of this article is to provide a general overview of the relevance and effectiveness of IT in office management as Gore and Leuwerke(2000:3) argued that rapid changes in computers and other telecommunications technologies may represent the most profound changes, challenges, facing our profession today.

2. Statement of the Problem

Existing studies have focused on information technology and its application in different fields. Among these are Braunstein (2000) that studies the use of Information Technology as a strategic tool for the prospective payment system, Gore and Leuwerke (2000) also apply IT to career assessment on the Internet, Green et al (2000) focus on Information technology in nurse Education through a multimedia approach to the teaching of biological sciences, while VanHoof et al(1996) work on the perceptions of lodging managers in the United States, Canada about Computer technology and they discovered that almost all lodging properties in United States used some form of computer technology. But as observed by Tiamiyu (2000) that discussions of IT usually focus on issues concerning the innovative and effective application and use of leading-edge computing and telecommunications systems and products for strategic or competitive exploitation of information within private sector businesses. However, 'useful' IT in specific organisations and contexts, demands the harmonious integration of computing, telecommunications and manual of ITs within those contexts. Therefore, there is the need to work on the prospects and challenges of IT in Office management from the educational perspective.

3. Aim and Objectives

The study aims presenting a review of Information Technology and Office Management by bringing to fore associated prospects and challenges. Thus, the main thrust of this research is to achieve the following:

- i) the importance of IT in Office Management;
- ii) the prospects of IT for students and professionals in Office Management;
- iii) the challenges of IT for students and professionals in Office Management; and
- iv) the recommendations for effective utilization of IT in Office Management.

4. Prospects of Information Technology in Office Management

Office Technology Management is a course of study that opens a lot of opportunity for students understudying it in tertiary institution.

Exposure to Modern IT: Apart from the fields of computer science and computer technology and engineering, there is no other course that exposes students to Modern IT equipment as Office Technology Management. Students are at an advantage of learning computer skills that will make them stand out in their chosen career.

IT Motivates Office Managers- this is achieved through easy access to information. The work becomes less cumbersome. Meetings could be recorded if the secretary is engaged somewhere and such records could be transcribed later. Recourse could be made to such records to crosscheck or reaffirm certain issues or decisions taken such meetings.

IT Reduces Paperwork - Modern IT reduces paperwork to a large extent. Memoranda and other types of internal communication could be circulated through electronic mail without the use of paper except for file copy of such information. More so, external communication could also be processed through electronic mail. For example, rather than making a photocopy of a document and send through post, such document could be scanned, attached and sent through email.

IT reduces cost- The cost of paper and office supplies are greatly reduced. Though, the initial cost of IT equipment could be much but considering the fact that as time goes on, the benefits would show up. Technology is advancing and due to many of its advantages that are more than the disadvantages, the eventual cost of running a business or company without IT equipment will be more than the cost of acquiring the equipment.

IT enhances Confidentiality of Information- To a large extent, IT assists in the conservation of information. Paperwork exposes information unnecessarily. Therefore, various means through which information can confidential information can be concealed are available through IT.

IT contributes to Operational Productivity- Several and much assignments can be done through IT. The world wide web provides an avenue through which organizations can advertise their services. A secretary can complete internal and external communication within a twinkle of an eye through IT. Also, a work that four to five people could have done could easily be done by one person with the right technological equipment in an office.

5. Challenges of Information Technology (IT) in Office Management

Inadequate IT Tools/Equipment – Modern and latest products of tools such as computers (Android), fax machines, photocopier, overhead projector etc are not readily available in some tertiary institutions. A times, such equipment are borrowed from sister institutions during accreditation, which literally implies that the students are denied the opportunity of the operational skills and knowledge they are supposed to acquire from the practical use of such equipment.

Integration of Old Technology with New Technology: Technology is dynamic. There is no other sector that experiences advancement as technology across the globe. Therefore, integration of old technology with new technology poses a great challenge to professionals and students of Office Technology and Management.

Tiamiyu (2000:228) observes this and opines that ‘However, such integration of the newer electronic with the older manual components of office technologies is often not easy, even in developed countries with their well developed IT cultures; it is much more difficult to achieve in the developing countries, where the newer technologies are perceived as foreign and too costly and are either poorly understood or mistrusted. Moreover, in developing countries, the newer technologies are often introduced either in incorrect doses or without the supportive infrastructure’.

Information Secrecy and lack of Accountability- According to Corkery (1995) and Galliers et al (1998), corrupt leaders or office holders tend to be more corrupt through IT because they easily conceal information through their secretaries. Therefore, they become less accountable to their subordinates and public.

IT Reduces Needed Human Personnel- It is generally believed that IT is a clog in the wheel of employment, especially for the youth. This is one of the disadvantages of IT because less human personnel are needed to manage offices with adequate IT equipment. Hence, one employee can effectively combine the functions of the company’s secretary, Personal assistant to the boss and clerical officer.

6. Recommendations

Provision of IT equipment- Professionals in Office management need IT equipment that will enhance their operational tasks such as preparing the monthly payroll, preparing research/policy reports and papers, keeping and processing statistical data on projects/activities, preparing budgets, forecasting and recording revenues/expenditures, maintaining and keeping records in secret and open registries, preparing charts and graphs from organisational data, typing letters and labelling envelopes ready for mailing. Therefore, all forms of IT equipment such as computers, fax machine, photocopier, scanner, Risograph, printer, binder etc. are to be utilized in the training of office managers so that they can meet up with the current trends in the profession.

Flexibility and Interactivity of Teaching- The trainers that train students of studying Office Technology and Management need to be flexible and interactive in the teaching. The students should be made to relate their problems in the course without fear and intimidation. As such, the students will learn better in a friendly atmosphere.

Incorporation of well defined IT into the Component of Curriculum- It is high time, the curriculum of students studying Office Technology was tailored towards modern IT, especially in Nigerian polytechnics. The current demands of IT in Office Management should be incorporated in the curriculum to equip the students. Less emphasis should be laid on Typewriting as a course with the use of typewriter while most offices in the modern age do not have typewriters.

Motivation of students and lecturers through IT approach to Teaching- this is believed would stimulate students with prior knowledge of IT and at the same time imbibing the willingness into the students with little or limited knowledge to acquire more.

Establishment of Computer Network- Computer network is a way of making information to be readily accessible in an institution. According to Kadiri (2012:1) Computer network is a connection of two or more computer systems together in order to share resources such as printers, drives, internet, telephone lines, fax machine, applications. This should not be limited or restricted to Computer field alone because establishment of computer network (wired and wireless) as a local area network in the practical laboratory will equip the students of Office Technology and Management towards the operational tasks ahead of them in the labour market. In a way, this will encourage students to be self dependent as they would have been familiar with the basics of computer operations. Hence, they have the option of offering secretarial services that bother on network operations.

7. Conclusion

Though the recommendations are by no means exhaustive, but if most of it are taken into consideration by stakeholders in the field of Office Management Technology, then it is hoped that various forms of improvement will be experienced in office management and students that are being groomed to become professionals in the field will be adequately equipped to handle the tasks ahead of them. It is also intended to serve as a guide to lecturers handling Office Management as a course in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

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