

Office Technology and Management Competencies Required in Today's Office as Perceived by Secretaries Employed in Major Establishments in Niger State

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Abstract

One hundred and five (105) secretaries working with selected establishments in Niger State were used to examine office technology and management (OTM) competencies required in modern office by secretaries. Data for the research were collected using a structured questionnaire with reliability of 0.79 and validated by two experts on research methodology. Data collected were analyzed by descriptive statistics employing means and standard deviation. The findings revealed that Information and Communication Competencies and reprographic skill competencies are highly required as perceived by secretaries in establishments. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the department of O.T.M. studies in all higher institutions of learning should establish and maintain a functional internet work stations hooked to the world wide web (www) to enhance on-line information processing.

Keywords: *Competencies, Office Technology and Management and Secretary*

Introduction

Office is a place where all kinds of paper work, including letters, correspondence, files, records, amongst others are maintained and dealt with (Ezinwa, 2016). For clarity, office is better seen as the coordinative nerve centre of every organization (Okafor, 2013). An effectively organized office enables management to plan its operations intelligently. The technological changes such as social media platforms taking place in the modern enterprises have not spared the secretarial profession. These innovations demand new skills and development of new professional and intellectual concepts to manage it. Office secretarial duty is one of the vocational areas which enable secretaries who are the major stakeholders in areas of office information processing to acquire the basic skills and knowledge for effective office administration (Ezinwa, 2016).

Management is the act of getting job done by a set of people in order to achieve set objectives. It is the process of getting jobs done in any given environment in the use of human resources, machinery and methods including social media platforms in order to achieve the set objectives of an organization (Atakpa, 2014). According to Oyinloye (2010), Office Technology and Management is a new nomenclature introduced by Nigeria Board for Technical Education

(N.B.T.E.) in 2004 to replace the former secretarial studies programme. The replacement is to make the recipients more Information and Communication Technology (ICT) compliant so as to fit into the world of work as new machines and equipment are emerging daily. Technology and Management Education is aimed at producing graduates with secretarial and office skills, who will be able to manage automated office in various field of endeavor. Yamimer (2020) noted that modern offices are equipped with new business models, right digital tools and brand new technology that connect and support employees for enhanced productivity. The new methods in office duties as a result of changes in technology call for adequate competencies in Office Technology and Management to perform maximally in today's modern offices. Office Technology and Management secretaries are individuals trained with requisite knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed in order to effectively manage their personal business and economic system.

In another vein, the new methods in office duties as a result of changes in technology call for adequate training and preparation of Office Technology and Management secretaries to acquire knowledge, skills, competencies and experiences required to perform maximally in today's modern offices. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2012) stated the need for functional, practical, relevant, and oriented education for the acquisition of appropriate skills and development of skill competencies for the students to contribute to national development to the society after graduation. Agbongiasede (2014) noted that skill competencies are vital and necessary for Office Technology and Management secretaries who wish to be self-reliant by way of setting up a private business through entrepreneurship venture. He added that with the skills acquired, the OTM secretaries can open a business centre to earn a living without searching for the elusive white collar jobs.

Competencies are the knowledge skills and behaviors that will enable a student after graduation to meet established performance criteria (Ezeama, 2016). These skills include the ability to operate the computer, use e-mail in sending and receiving information, access the world wide web (www) effectively using the web browser, surfing the internet address, host address and home page. Other internet services such as the Usenet, newsgroup, telecommuting on tele-document interchange, public voice messaging, radio paging and internet replay information dissemination, records management and general workflow, which are highly needed for the success of every business (Chukwumezie, 2010).

OTM competencies are those abilities that enable the secretary perform office duties most effectively. This calls for constant monitoring so as to bring about necessary training towards the acquisition of a matching skills (Nwogwugwu, 2017). The following skills according to Nwosu (2018) are word processing, keyboarding, formatting, proof-reading, saving text, printing, teleconferencing, reprography, editing, composition of business letters, micrographics, amongst others. Azuka (2014) added that the roles of the automated office are receiving and giving information, arranging and storing information, recording information, retaining and safe-keeping records, public relations and form design and control. The process and application of mechanized techniques of carrying out the functions of the office in this technological era has led to what we call information technology, which is the convergence of tools of microelectronics, telecommunications, and computers (Osugwu in Ohakwe, 2017).

The secretarial profession is as old as man himself. The skillful secretaries were responsible for accurate documentation of meeting procedures, speeches and historical activities (Okoji, 2015). Office technology and management is sometimes referred to secretarial duties, office procedure, clerical office practice, machine or model office duties, secretarial practice, or some variation of the titles (Pulife, 2022). The role secretary plays in an office is wide and varied depending on the size and type of organization in which she is working. It includes: opening and sorting the mails, filling correspondence and other documents, dealing with visitors, keeping desk diary both for herself and her boss among others (Azuka 2014). Obi (2015), noted that a skilled secretary would take dictations and transcribe them into mailable documents. Other necessary skills and competencies include verbal communication, transcription, planning, organizing, and decision making skills, effective system of handling incoming mails, distribution of correspondence, editing, and saving documents.

The technological changes taking place in the modern enterprises have not spared the OTM profession. These innovations demand new skills and competencies, and development of new professional and intellectual concepts. Nwosu (2018) observed that, in Nigeria several government and business offices are already being computerized. What is required is to embark on an analysis of the situation to ascertain inadequacies, strengths and limitations and provide functional training that will enable the O.T.M. graduates not only to secure a job but also to progress on it. Therefore, for changes in data processing and information technology handling to be adequately embraced and meaningful, secretaries employed in establishments require O.T.M. competencies that are relevant to modern information processing tasks. They should possess the competencies and skills of word processing, information communication technology, reprographic, managerial and technical skills.

Statement of the Problem

With the introduction of computers and specialized software packages like word processors, secretarial routine jobs of data processing have been seriously affected positively. While describing the sorry plight of the secretary under the traditional office, Akinyemi (2015) noted that secretaries spent their time trying to produce error-free documents in the use of old methods while maintaining an even typing space. This old system has made some secretaries redundant and unsuitable for their retention in the office or for gaining employment into any establishment. Many of the secretaries find it difficult to develop their skills to meet up with the needs of today's office automation. Consequent upon this, many of such establishments are left with no other option than to lay off such redundant secretaries who are not willing to develop themselves on the use of modern office equipment for greater productivity, thereby creating room for the employment of secretaries who have vast knowledge of automated office. It was because of the above problems that prompted the research into the investigation on the secretarial skills needed in modern office as perceived by secretaries employed in government establishments in Niger State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the office technology and management competencies needed in modern office as required by secretaries employed in government establishment in Niger State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the Information Communication Technology (ICT) competencies required by secretaries of establishment in Niger State.
2. Determine the reprographic skills required by secretaries of establishments in Niger State.

Research Questions

1. What are the information communication technology competencies required by secretaries of establishments in Niger State?
2. What are the reprographic skills required by secretaries of establishments in Niger State?

Methodology

The design for the study was descriptive survey design. This is the design which according to Atuenyi (2014) is basic for all types of research in assessing the situation as a prerequisite to inference and generalization. It is one of the common designs for studies involving opinion and attitude measurement. This design is suitable for this study because questionnaire used to seek the opinions of respondents. This study design is considered appropriate for this study because a sample of major establishments was used to represent the entire population in Niger State on their perception of OTM competencies required in modern office. One hundred and five (105) secretaries served as the respondents (sample size) and were drawn from ten (10) establishments in Niger State as contained in Table 1.

Table 1 Constitution of Sample Framework

S/N	Establishment	No. of Secretaries
1	Federal College of Education Kontagora	25
2	Niger State Ministry of Health Minna	10
3	Niger State Board of Internal Revenue Minna	5
4	Niger State Polytechnic Zungeru	15
5	Federal Polytechnic Bida	25
6	Power Holding of Nigeria Plc Minna	5
7	Niger State Education Board Minna	5
8	Shiroro Hotels Minna	5
9	Federal Road Safety Commission Minna	5
10	Niger State Ministry of Agriculture Minna	5
	Total	105

The questionnaire used was subjected to face validated by three experts with a reliability of 0.79 obtained by the Cronbach Alpha method, showing that the instrument was reliable. The questionnaire was structured on a five (5) point rating scale, with responses categories as Very Much Required (5), Much Required (4), Required (3), Somewhat Required (2), and Not Required (1). The questionnaire was administered to the respondents with 100 % retrieval recorded. The

research questions were answered and analyzed using mean and standard deviation, and any response from 2.5 and above were taken as the criterion mean value for acceptance, while any response below 2.5 were not accepted.

Data presented in Table 2 revealed that all the 20 items on information and Communication Technology competencies required by secretaries had their means ratings above the cut-off point of 3.00 indicating that they are the ICT competencies required by secretaries for effective functioning on their jobs. Also the standard deviation ranges between 1.00–1.34 indicating that their responses are not far from each other. The data presented in Table 2 showed that the mean ratings of all the respondents range from 3.80 – 4.24 which are greater than the cut-off point of 2.50 on the five (5) point rating scale. This is an indication that the 20 items on ICT competencies are required in any establishment. The standard deviation values of the 20 items on the table range from 1.00–1.34 which signifies that the responses of the respondents are close to one another and the mean.

Table 2 ICT Competencies required by secretaries of Establishments in Niger State.

S/N	Items Statements	N	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
1.	Ability to type effectively using computer, and receive e-mail	105	4.16	1.11	Much Required
2.	Manage incoming and outgoing mails	105	4.24	1.00	Much Required
3.	Use of fax messages	105	4.08	1.11	Much Required
4.	Operate teleconferencing facilities	105	4.09	1.10	Much Required
5.	Send and receive messages through computer networks	105	4.10	1.13	Much Required
6.	Adequate knowledge of information processing	105	4.17	1.13	Much Required
7.	Send and receive correspondence by telex and private branch exchange	105	4.17	1.04	Much Required
8.	Send and receive correspondence by telephone and mobile phone	105	4.10	1.07	Much Required
9.	Use of internet cafes	105	4.16	1.08	Much Required
10.	Select ideas best suited for the purpose	105	4.18	1.08	Much Required
11.	Employ good listening	105	4.11	1.10	Much Required
12.	Ability to store information	105	4.09	1.13	Much Required
13.	Browse and download information from internet	105	4.07	1.07	Much Required
14.	Operate video conferencing facilities	105	3.97	1.08	Much Required
15.	Co-ordinate mail services with the post office	105	4.05	1.16	Much Required
16.	Use communication packages	105	4.05	1.15	Much Required
17.	Use of mobile phones	105	3.97	1.18	Much Required
18.	Ability to detect fraud	105	3.80	1.34	Much Required
19.	Use of Usenet/group	105	3.96	1.34	Much Required
20.	Compose, send and receive electronic mail (e-mail)	105	4.15	1.07	Much Required
	Grand Mean		4.2		Required

\bar{X} =Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, N=Number of Respondents

Table 3 Reprographic Competencies required by secretaries of establishments.

S/N	Items Statements	N	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
1.	Ability of collating documents accurately	105	4.20	0.95	Much Required
2.	Using electronic scanning facilities	105	4.13	1.08	Much Required
3.	Ability to use photocopier	105	4.10	1.12	Much Required
4.	Ability to use facsimile reprographics	105	4.27	0.87	Much Required
5.	Ability to using scanning for reproducing document	105	4.25	0.95	Much Required
6.	Use of repetitive printing method	105	4.18	1.05	Much Required
7.	Reduce or enlarge document using photocopier	105	3.90	1.23	Much Required
8.	Ability to use spiral binding machine	105	4.25	0.92	Much Required
9.	Ability to coordinate reprographic services and use of material	105	3.88	1.39	Much Required
Grand Mean			4.6		Required

\bar{X} =Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, N=Number of Respondents

The data presented in Table 3 revealed that all the 9 items listed had their means above the cut-off point of 3.00. These means ranges from 3.88 – 4.25 indicating that secretaries much require reprographic competencies in doing their job. The standard deviation also ranges from 0.39–1.12 indicating the respondents' closeness of opinion. The data presented in Table 3 showed that the mean ratings of all the respondents range from 3.88 – 4.25 which are greater than the cut-off point of 2.50 on the five (5) point rating scale. This is an indication that the 9 items on reprographic competencies are required as perceived by secretaries in any establishment. The standard deviation values of the 9 items on the table range from 0.92–1.39 which signifies that the responses of the respondents are close to one another and the mean.

Discussion of Findings

Regarding the OTM competencies in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), all the respondents under this cluster rated them much required for secretaries working in establishment in Niger State. Twenty (20) variables were used to answer the research questions in relation to the above mentioned ICT competencies. Among these skills include ability to: type effectively using computer and receive e-mail; fax messages; send messages; use internet; browse and download information; operate video conferencing; use mobile phone; and compose and send e-mail. Backing up the findings, Boytziz (2010) pointed out that there is a lifelong need to update our skills towards the use of these emerging technologies in order to become relevant and accurate information and also to enable us share these information with others. The high mean rate of 3.80–4.24 gave credence to the fact that secretaries should be competent enough in handling and use of ICT facilities in sending and receiving information. Oyinloye (2010) also observed that secretaries will be confronted with such concepts as internet connectivity, the e-mail and the e-commerce concepts, the skills in browsing the website and how to use search engines to locate information amongst others.

More so, from the findings in Table 3 reprographic competencies were also rated much required by the respondents. All the nine (9) variables were used to answer the research question in relation to reprographic competencies. The variables include abilities: to collate documents; to use electronic scanning facilities; to use photocopier; to use facsimile; and to use scanning for reproducing material. This is shown in Table 3 by the means ranging from .88 – 4.25. These findings are consistent with the views of some authors. Ojo and Akinyemi (2015) found out that modern reprographic technologies have impact on secretarial functions. Secretaries should therefore know the modern repetitive printing method of reprographics, use of ink and spirit duplicators in reproducing copies of documents, techniques of producing documents through the process of photocopying and facsimile reprographics, use of electronic copier/prints, electronic scanning, phototypesetting, etc. Secretaries should not only know the skills and processes of reprographics but also should be able to teach the junior ones how to use them, hence the importance of these skills for them in performing effectively in the organization.

Conclusion

It pertinent to conclude that secretaries employed in major establishments ought to possess office technology and management competencies in information and communication technology and reprographics. Secretaries are the major stakeholders in office technology and management

processing and require the competencies for effective job performance. Thus, secretaries who want to be functional are required to be versatile in the application of the modern information processing facilities.

It was further revealed that office automation has contributed immensely to the overall job performance of secretaries, as it has helped in facilitating standardization of office routine and procedures; increased speed and accuracy, and relieved secretaries of boredom involved in carrying out repetitive work when it was done by the old manual methods, and so giving secretaries a better chance in the present business world with an automated office.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Secretarial staff employed in government and private establishments should constantly update their skills in information and communication technology competencies through in-service training, workshops, seminars, conferences and personal study.
2. Managements of these establishments should, as a matter of urgency, organize retraining programmes of their secretaries, as this will bring about efficiency and productivity.

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