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Strategising Technological Innovations In The Modern Office: Educational Implications

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Abstract

The objective of this paper was to assess the strategies so adopted in office functions brought about by the influx of modern technological trends. It was aimed at identifying the roles that education has to play in equipping existing workers, those preparing to enter the world of work especially the business education students. Different approaches were consulted as to the need for institutions to regularly update teaching and learning as un-updated educational tools become obsolete within a short time due to technological changes. The paper pointed out that graduates from these updated programmes secures employment to work in these offices. Conclusion was drawn that while institutions should update programmes, offices should ensure to send their staff on regular trainings to be conversant with the use and application of modern office facilities.

Introduction

In his examinations of technology, Mullins (1996) had observed that technology is pervasive within contemporary organisations. To the authors, technology is observable in its various forms in small and large businesses, the service sectors, state institutions, manufacturing companies, educational institutions, multi-national organizations, and the local corner shops. Some opined that technology is brought into these organisations by people, put into work by people and is also discarded by people. Technology in this regard can therefore be seen as the knowledge and scientific procedures, techniques, and equipment that are applicable to industrial situation. The educational implication of this opinion is that the method and purpose for which technology is applied in the organization is entirely in the hands of those who work in the organization. It further imports that stakeholders in organizations must have good understanding of the nature of both existing and innovative new technologies in addition to organizational and

human resources capabilities.

Many nations are daily developing new strategies on how to remain relevant in global social economic activities. These nations watch events, take note of their challenges, successes, failures and opportunities, and effect changes where necessary especially in their school curriculum believing that every change in the society has to come through school programmes. Such nations are working for development towards the future and have started experimenting their successes. In the opinion of Amadi (2008), for a nation to develop industrially and technologically, she must ensure her youths have adequate opportunities to participate in meaningful and authentic application of educational technologies. This implies that school curriculum must have to be dynamic to absorb changes where necessary so that these young generation of our youths must be exposed to the rudiments of whatever changes that are occurring in the global educational arena.

Education in the right direction has to be accompanied by a focused programme of occupational information and career awareness. This helps the younger generations grasp the rudiments of determining their career choices while making progress at different levels of their schooling. It is expected that the ongoing rebranding project of the Federal Government will see the need to take education seriously beyond the level she has kept it. Using the global advantage of modern innovations, Nigeria can exploit the advantages of educational partnership to make proper advancement into the world of technology.

Bearing in mind that the world of works does not only require absolute attention on the learning youths, Igberaharha (2009) also postulated in very strong terms that the use of modern communication tools in their right combinations in teaching and learning environment was a necessity. This has to be so in order to improve the conventional practices which invariably has the capability to improve and import new methods into the system. A closer attention at the use of these tools makes it necessary that transformation are introduced on the old methods of teaching and learning experiences. Looking at the business office from the dynamic nature of the society, Chibuike & Igboke (2009) emphasized that the new technology is seen as a system designed to acquire, analyse, synthesis, store, retrieve, and distribute appropriate and needed information by office facilitators to enable them perform their duties. By these elements, it also means that in the business office, there is need for accessible technological and functional process.

In the modern business office, there is need for any technology strategy to fit into the business function of the organization. This will help to streamline the business competitive strategy; objectives and measures of success. In any form that this technology is imported. Ikpo (2009) emphasized that it must align with the business plan and needs. Contributing to the accessible technology strategy of modern business office, Enyekit (2006) said that there are five characteristics which are explained below:

Defining the accessible technology strategy in which case the business office tries to determine how that type of technology fits into the office environment all other variable remaining favourable.

In the next level, it is expected that there will be the need for development of comprehensive set of requirement by describing the scope of the needs of the office in line with the existing technology.

Furthermore, stakeholders thereafter are expected to look out for accessible and assistive technology products that will be compatible with the office environment and that which will meet the needs of the organization.

This is followed by the process of training of existing staff to make them friendly with the use of these technologies and their feature. This aspect is necessary due to the fact that the existing personnel had been used to the traditional method of effectively carrying out their responsibilities and needs to be updated for increased productivity.

Finally, for increased productivity in the competitive market, efforts must be put in place to ensure that the vision of accessible technology must be maintained. This is done through increased support for success and opportunities for personal improvement of workers.

Taking a clue from the above, this means that all the innovative functions must be applied by office facilitators to help them carry out their duties such as sending out information, collection of messages, storage and retrieval of information. These need to be done using all forms of communicating information through the application of the fastest and reliable means. Unlike the traditional office setting, Ordu, Ozuruoke, & Enyekit (2008) emphasized that the modern office is greatly assisted by modern technology to process, store, retrieve and communicate information using the most reliable, secured and fast means. The application of these equipment has made it possible for geographical locations to disappear as a hindrance in human interactions. The mere touch of a facility

button in one office connects an individual to someone else several kilometers away.

Another interesting aspect of this connection is that office and administrative contacts are made without the disadvantages of geographical location. Activities such as business contacts, greetings, payments, meetings, messages, etc are concluded and agreements sealed. Just as haulage firms are contracted to deliver physical goods, so also banks are used for payments and other financial transactions without necessarily physical meeting of all the participants involved in such transactions.

Furthermore, developed nations have left behind the issue of industrialization which was the in-thing a couple of decades ago, to information technologies today. In this era of information technological trends, the in-thing is the application of computer and computer assisted facilities as the major means of information transportation. To the developed nations, these were not just seen and imported from the moon. Rather, they saw the rays of power and captured it through modification of school curriculum where and when it was applicable. These nations recognized schools background as the only basis for a change from the moribund traditional system to a viable innovative system. They also recognized the private subsector economy as the fastest basis to bring about fast development of the nation. This must have informed them on why vocational and entrepreneurship education are encourage in developed societies.

Placing these developments of the office and the functionalities of office administrators, we also noticed that these were achieved without the active and most significant role of teaching and learning process. The implication of education in this regards is of the highest relevance since its effective application must be learnt and taught from schools. So, those who are at school will need to learn about the new applications to be able to fit into the offices on their graduation. It is also a necessity that those who are already working must be sent on short time programmes, conferences and workshops for the purposes of retraining and acquiring new skills to face the challenges of new office

environment.

The old office

From the introductory section of this paper, it is apt to note that the objective of the office yesterday is still the aim today. It is nothing more than offering services to the client and improving productivity for the continued success of the organization and man. It is the same workers who bring in new technologies, use it, discard it and look on to new ones. This aim has remained the same to date except for methods in achieving them.. It may also be true to say that the beginning of the 20th century was also the beginning of rapid change in office functions. This was the period when office functions started to face new challenges for improvement. Practitioners looked out for ways and methods by which improvements can be effected to change traditional methods of relationships. In the traditional office setting, functions were rudely performed and creation of information was manually done. At that time, these disadvantages were not noticeable because there were no other methods to compare with what was then functional. So everybody adopted it and society progressed from that stage to another. The application of functions generated needs for improvement as there appeared to have been need for better contacts among participants and better relationships among people whether in the same locality or beyond the immediate geographical locations.

The business office

There has been noticeable discussions at business conferences, workshops and other fora about strategizing business activities to make business educators more relevant in the scheme of educational project in this entrepreneurship and information driven society. What is happening in the business world creates the challenge in the minds of business education watchers. There are on the increase new improvements in electronics soft ware and applications shaping the needs of business office for those who are ready to accept the challenges. These new developments are challenges to the business educators who must fashion out new ways to educate prospective

business educators to withstand the innovative challenges of the time. These challenges are associated with computer and computer assisted equipment. But Agomuo (2005) felt that the nation's technological development has been dull consequent upon the fact that her preparation to accept computer facilities was not adequately made before its arrival. To Chibuike & Igboke (2009), these challenges have been surmounted and they have contributed to new and improved ways of processing, storing and transmission of information leading to high growth in the use of information and data processing transmission. In all, the business office now has the advantage of possessing the components of information technologies in the form of computers, telecommunications and microelectronics to improve office activities and service delivery.

To the office, this is a noticeable revolution that has wiped out the barriers of geographical location, time and space. Office activities in North Korea can now be connected to office activities of Nigeria thousands of kilometers away for easy access and exchange of information. The ace to modern business activities is found in information and technological power. The possession of this power changes the nature and scope of any office function thereby fashioning a new way of carrying out functions for the interest of participants leading to increased productivity.

Modern office equipment

Among the office equipment in a modern business environment are the dictating machine which records information and further enables the user to play back what has been recorded using his own pace setting. Although dictating machine appears to be fading away because of the influx of some other computer related equipment that have taken control of the limitations of dictating machine. Furthermore, the mobile phone has been fashioned in a way that it serves so many other purposes in addition to calls. It is used as recording facilities, viewing facilities, search equipment, surveillance, digital slide projector, printing, image making, etc. Copiers, scanners,

computers, printers have all been rolled in and rolled over as improvements in the office functions.

With the presence of these equipment, office function has become fantastically mobile such that business office is no longer restricted to the one associated with a physical building. It must be noted that virtually all these equipment have been manufactured with the digital provision of mobile services even where power supply is epileptic or non-available for a couple of hours. Equipment such as the laptop computer, the mobile phone, printers, digital slide projectors etc are provided with inbuilt power-parked that enables users to create and print where necessary in a remote location. Aside from this provision, some wireless networked provisions have also been made to the effect that information can be created in the outskirts of Port Harcourt in Rivers State while printing is made effective at the same time in Uyo, Akwa Ibom state several kilometers away from the source of information. This information printed in any form such as image, mails, films, data, etc can be distributed online from any primary receiver.

Where the issue of networked computer facilities are made, the link can be multiple. By this, Amadi (2008) emphasised that the source is provided with many outlets through which that single information is made available electronically to several users according to their own desires and schedules. A particular user reserves the choice to edit the aspect of information within his/her reach which has been activated in his/her own system without affecting the usage of other applicants. In fact, his modification is effected in what seems in the system as the duplicate copy of the original information which does not in any way reflect on wither the original copy or any other person's copy. In fact, this technology provides the services in such a manner that nobody, not even the users of the information even knows that somebody else is making use of the information irrespective of the number of people using that information at the same time.

In all, these activities revolve around the creation of information, originating desired

information, processing the information, reproducing other information, filing information, sorting and indexing of information, preservation of information, etc

Repositioning the business office

The whole issue of strategizing technological innovations in the business office concerns the call for business office to become more relevant in the scheme of modern trends. By this advancement to the innovative office, the type of education offered to business education graduates may also play a major role. It calls for a more purposive course contents that are relevant to modern trends. It calls for activities that are capable of challenging the students into the realization of the potentials of creativity, entrepreneurship and self-reliant. It calls for the office where workers have the potentialities of manipulating with ease all the resources within work schedule and effectively raising productivity. Since man by nature introduced technology, use technology and discard technology, it becomes necessary to say that man is a dynamic animal in a dynamic process. Those in the business office appreciate the fact that possession of relevant knowledge and skills are relevant to the functions of the office which enables the organization to be moved forward in the competitive market environment.

In all these, education plays the major role since these changes are bordering on development. Lots of innovative equipment have been introduced to the market and these are meant for the business office functions. This new technology is such an awesome developmental machine all leading to the centre point role of computer. Some couple of decades ago in Nigeria, the issue of computer was not heard of. But today, computers are everywhere as tools of greatest technological revolution in our life time. These innovations have affected all aspects of our life activities such as the process of keeping records of inventory in local shops, make hotel reservations, keep our financial records, update records of banking transactions, check our financial credits, record teaching and learning process, control surveillance, forecast weather trends, forecast

market trends, and now applicable in all aspects of educating the child, etc. Since modern innovations have the composites of the above lists, including the aspects of helping the child in the learning and teaching process, it imports that the business office is at the centre of benefiting from technology. To keep pace with these advances, the business office at all levels have the need to rebrand in human, materials and infrastructural resources.

Contributing to the debate on the impact of computer and computer assisted facilities, Boone & Kurtz (1976) pointed out that one of the earliest and most widespread uses of computers in business is for storing and processing records. As it was pointed out earlier, the functions of the office has remained the same since the beginning of time. If as it has been cited above the functions of the computer had been storing and processing information, today the innovative functions have remained the same. The changes has been on the different ways of applications to raise productivity. This has now generated to the proliferation of different facilities all working towards the processing of information for effective productivity of the office. Today, there is virtually no aspect of information processing that is not available on the application of the computer networks.

Considering the above, one thing most people will agree with is that we all look forward to a better future. Standard of living has risen rapidly over the years and educational processes has changed with time. Children at all levels of education system have something to do with computer and computer networking. The business office is expected to predict future conditions for their organizations. No aspect of the office functions should be neglected or face underestimation of associated problem that are likely to be involved in this task of office productivity. The accelerating pace of innovations has shown that prediction is difficult because of the speed with which changes occur. It has become difficult for business executives or business educators to assume that what happened a couple of days ago or even today in the society will be the same a couple of days ahead. Things are rapidly

changing even methods of educating the youths' needs to change accordingly to keep pace with the rapidly changing technological trends. There is no doubt the fact that some of the equipment in the offices today will become obsolete a couple of years ahead. Factors such as population changes, life style changes, economic changes, societal changes, technological changes, and of course business strategic changes, etc., are trends that will affect and determine the pace of business activities. These changes require new resources to make products economically and technologically reliable.

New phase of education is necessary because new technology is being introduced at a rate faster than what it was a couple of decades ago. These changes in technology means that production methods must be updated which by implication means that current workers must be educationally updated and retrained, and the way of reasoning by management should also be changed. Collaborating this, Boone et al (1976) observed that because technological changes require people to change, today's education will become outdated within ten years after graduation. This means that people can become occupationally obsolete as a result of technological changes. With this in mind, it becomes necessary that educators emphasis lifelong education and training so that people will remain productive as long as they are strong and willing to work. Technology has remained a way of improving standard of living and the quality of life. These changes as stated above have had some significant effects on how organizations manage their affairs today. All these have also generated management concern to realise the attitudes and problems of modern work environment made up of different sets of work force. These levels of work force require different managerial approaches which will focus on solving tomorrow's problems by a purposive preparation today. This requires flexibility of the office and preparation to meet new situations with business strategies designed for the future. This new arrangement requires a sound educational arrangement to train up qualified executives without which the business office will suffer. The use of qualified

personnel here refers to those who have a solid understanding of the business systems and those whose education and training provide them the skills to adapt to changes. Conclusively, Boone et al (1996) opined that 'change is a vital part of everyday business life. Change was yesterday's challenge; it is also today's challenge it will be tomorrow's challenge'

Educational implications for business activities

From our readings, it was observed that information technology is the key to modern innovative business activities. It is difficult to find business outfits without any of these modern equipment. According to Ordu (2003), in the past when shorthand and typewriting skills held the ace in business activities, business departments were the focal points of viable activities both on campuses and in the industrial subsectors. But modern new trends seem to have posed a challenge on this business education students' pride of the past. This issue raises the question on how our higher institutions offering business education programmes are giving students this corresponding orientation to meet the trends in office requirements of today and the future. Looking at these functions from business activities perspectives, Owolabi (2009) simply opined that communication in the office environment is a necessity and it is the exchange of information, ideas, data, etc leading to the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information in the form of data, text, images, etc.

Contributing further to the debate on the educational implications of technological trends to business office, Chibuike & Igboke (2009) complained that most of our business education graduates have no skills to boot the computer let alone using computer to work with. She lamented the fact that another majority cannot even search for information using the computer while only very few succeed in dousing these challenges while at school. The further implication is that as they are turned out into the labour market without the skills and competencies to use the

computer, they become total embarrassments to their would-be employers.

This situation was further complicated by the result of a recent study cited by Chibuiké & Igboke (2009) in which six universities and nine colleges of education were studied. The revelation was that students lack knowledge of basic Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) skills which ought to be impacted on them from the classroom. To the above citations, the question was posed as to what should be done to capture these challenges. The solution, according to Thom-Otuya & Ubulom (2009) remained in proper funding of business education departments making provisions for adequate infrastructural, human, and material resources.

Conclusions

The work on strategizing the office for technological advancement in the business organisations is a project focusing on the needs to update the office environment. This, we must bear in mind that technological changes have always occurred in the society and the office environment had revolutionized in content and context. The office requires people with the right educational competencies and skills whose contents are dynamic to adapt easily to further education and trainings as need arise. Education, especially those meant for the business office must be focused on the realities of technological and entrepreneurship innovations so that the business office will be opened to accommodate both staff and emerging technological innovations.

Recommendations

Based on the above, the paper strongly recommends that improved learning facilities be made available for educational institutions. This will enable them to do way with outdated course contents and introduce modern course contents.

Management should realize that changes are occurring daily on ways and means to improve the office today. Therefore, their traditional ways of thinking should be done away with in place of modern trends in office functions

There is need to accord special technological focus on the development of our office. Doing this means a collaborative partnership between organizations and educational institutions. Government should harmonize this so that the business office could be strategically positioned to work along innovative technologies.

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