

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCIES AND MANAGERS' JOB PERFORMANCE IN STATE-OWNED UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between communication competencies and office managers' job performance in State owned universities in Rivers State. It was recommended among others that, administrators of State-owned universities in Rivers State should organize workshop for managers from time to time on information management best practices. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that office managers' information management competencies with proxies as records management competencies, communication competencies and information technology competencies have significant positive, no, moderate and weak/low relationships with their job performance with proxies as tasks and contextual performance in State owned universities in Rivers State. In clear terms, however, records management competencies and communication competencies do not bring about task performance and contextual performance.

Keywords: Communication Competencies, Managers' Job performance, State-Owned University

INTRODUCTION

Universities in Rivers State on daily basis during active sessions generate large quantity and quality information from different stakeholders through their activities such as students' admissions, employments, conferences, seminars, examinations, accreditations, and meetings. Most of these information passes through the desk of departmental secretaries for the purpose of classification, documentation, storage, dissemination, and sometimes disposal. However, as an insider in the education sector, the researcher observed that there are many cases of misplacement and even loss of vital information in most universities in Rivers State. The researcher also observed the slow speed with which needed information relating to students' admission, examination records and staff are sorted out from the manual storage systems used in most universities in Rivers State. This is because departments, faculties and the entire universities' community information are mostly kept in large volume in stores for at least five years before they can be disposed of. It is worth noting that despite procurements and integration of information technology devices, access to wired and wireless networks and the availability of database maintained by the universities Management Information System (MIS) departments, much information are still duplicated in numbers within and across departments through secretaries for heads of departments causing wasteful spending both to original owners and the institutions as custodians in this era of information technology (IT). There is also problem of allocating large office space to keep students' files manually every year when students are admitted by secretaries. The problems associated to this manually information management process can be appreciated by those who bear the brunt such as lecturers, students, managements and other relevant stakeholders when the need arises to access vital information capable of facilitating accurate and timely decision making. Hence, the question that comes to mind with these problems: Is whether office managers (secretaries) in State owned universities in Rivers State posses the required information management competencies needed for the performance of their job responsibilities relating to effective information management? It is based on the problems stated above and to answer this question that the present study was conceived to examine the relationship between information

management competencies of office managers and their job performance in State owned universities in Rivers State.

Communication Competencies

Today's office manager works in a democratic environment where collaboration and cooperation take precedence during information generation, processing, dissemination and storage. Hence the need for the office manager to develop effective communication knowledge and skills that would enable the accomplishment of routine jobs cannot be overemphasised. According to Bodie (2010), communication competencies has to do with effective and appropriate use of an organization's communication patterns to adapt to the knowledge of various context of works within and outside the organization. Enache and Crisan (2014) opined that communication competencies needed for effective information management job performance today include: ability to listen effectively and present information accessibly, ability to share one's point of view to other people; ability to cooperate, work in a team and be willing to share information to others; ability to establish criteria and make classifications of retrieved information; ability to easily find information on a given topic offline and online; and ability to access various information sources for documentation purposes. According to Harvard Human Resource (2020), communication competencies for enhancing performance across organization include: verbal communication skills, written communication skills and presentation communication skills. Alison (2020) noted that office managers like office assistants may be the first visitors see, and at times be the only one they see when one of the professionals working in office happens to be out, therefore, office manager required a lot of communication competencies in order to resolve issues and delegate works. The author outline the following communication competencies required of office manager: written communication, oral communication, reception, phone etiquette, approachability and active listening.

Listening competencies

Listening is one of the most important skills an office manager should have. According to Cooper et al. (2012), effective listening is the foundation of strong workplace relationship. Allmon (2021) suggested that people listen for three reasons which are informational (listening to learn), critical listening (listening to evaluate and analyze), and therapeutic or empathetic listening (listening to understand feeling and emotion). The purpose of listening normally determines which is activated at a particular point in time.

According to Bohlken (2021), effective listening has far reaching benefits to officer managers because, it can foster trust, reduce conflict, and increase the level of commitment among followers. Bohlken noted that effective listening skills are the ability to actively understand information provided by the speaker, and display interest in the topic discussed. Money Zine (2021) noted that being a effective in listening means focusing on the person who's speaking, not to interrupt or respond but rather just to hear them out first before responding. Money Zine outlined some important listing skills need by information managers to include recognizing main ideas, recognizing supportive ideas, listening with open mind, understanding the speaker's purpose of speaking, discriminates between statements, and detect bias and prejudice.

Presentation competencies

Today, presentation competencies are required in almost every field, and most of us are required to give presentations on occasions; while some people take this in their stride, others find it much more challenging. According to Hentz (2006), presenting information clearly and effectively is a key skill in getting message across. However, the competencies are summarized to the "five-Ps of presentation". Knight, Aitken and Rogerson (2010) noted that the five Ps of presentation are planning, preparation, consistency, practice and performance. According to Knight et al. (2010), presentations competencies and public speaking skills are very useful in many aspects of work and life. Knight, Aitken and Rogerson noted that effective presentations and public speaking skills are

important in business, sales and selling, training, teaching, lecturing, and generally feeling comfortable speaking to a group of people. For PowerPoint presentation, Blaszczyński and Green (2010) noted that the 10 - 20 - 30 minutes rule defines the proficiency of any office or information manager in information presentation. Blaszczyński and Green noted that in presentation using PowerPoint one should try to have a limit of 10 slides in order to reduce the cognitive load of the audience; 20 minutes is sufficient, one should leave out unnecessary details and focus on the important stories that will convey the message; a font size of 30 is adequate enough to displayed text.

According to Cyphert (2011), presentation competency is having the ability or skill to confidently deliver an engaging message to a group of people. Cyphert outlined seven essential presentation skills required of a presenter as: (a) thorough preparation of content, (b) structuring content logically, (c) managing nerves, (d) engaging your audience, (e) delivering presentation objectives, (f) positively influencing the audience, and (g) responding to audience needs.

Relationship between communication competencies and office managers' job performance

According to CareerBuilder (2017), since almost all tasks carried out by office managers (administrative assistant) relate to written or verbal correspondence, one of the basic competencies needed for success is communication competence. The author noted that these communication competencies include knowledge and ability to communicate information clearly on paper and using technology. Aslan and Ayse (2017) noted that office managers are required to bridge the gap between different levels of management staff in order to ensure smooth departmental operations, hence they prepare and disseminate basic operational reports of the teams, groups, projects, or functions that they are responsible for using written communication skills and resolve conflicts that may arise within organization using oral communication skills. Abdulkarim (2019) opined that the ability of the office managers to contribute effectively to performance of routine tasks depend on their communication prowess to source for tactic information required to direct the flow of works. According to Miller (2010), communication competencies needed for effective information management include but not limited to ability to prepare facts in advance of meetings, ability to consider the impact of reports before putting them forward for consideration, ability to communicate information positively, ability to use graphics in information presentation where possible and ability to keep the message simple and clear while communicating. Umoru and Yusuf (2018) noted that communication competencies used by office personnel centres on ability to use appropriate telephone techniques, effective oral communication and clear and concise letters, punctuation, capitalization and numerical forms to deliver office tasks.

Theory of Job Performance by Campbell et al. (1993)

Campbell, McCloy, Oppler and Sager's (1993) theory of performance stated that job performance is concerned with actions or behaviors under the control of the individual, that contribute to the organization's goals, and that can be measured according to the individual's level of proficiency in different job related areas. Campbell *et al*/outlined eight job performance factors: job-specific task proficiency, on-job task proficiency, written and oral communication, efforts exerted, maintaining personal discipline, contributing to peer and team work, supervision and management or administration of functions. The theorist gave a concise explanation of each of the eight dimensions of performance as follows:

Job-specific task proficiency is defined as how well an individual employee performs tasks that make up the core or technical aspect of a job which distinguish it from other jobs. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) explained job-specific task proficiency as "the proficiency with which job incumbents perform activities that are formally recognized as part of their jobs; activities that

contribute to the organization's technical core either directly by implementing a part of its technological process, or indirectly by providing it with needed materials or services (p. 73)".

Non-job-specific task proficiency is concern with how well the employee is able to perform the tasks that are not specific to a particular the job, but is expected of most or all jobs in the organization. Effort exerted is concerned with the consistency or perseverance and intensity of an employee's commitment to complete job tasks, whereas maintenance of personal discipline refers to doing away with negative behaviors (such as rule infractions, absenteeism, and alcohol abuse) at work which may affect performance. Management or administration differs from supervision in that the former includes performance behaviors directed at managing the organization that are distinct from supervisory or leadership roles. Written and oral communications has to do with how well the employee can communicate in written or oral form independent of the correctness of the subject matter to others. According to Campbell and colleagues, these eight dimensions are sufficient to describe the latent structure of performance at a general level. Campbell et al. (1990), however, point out that the salience or importance of these eight dimensions differs across occupational groups.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that office managers' information management competencies with proxies as records management competencies, communication competencies and information technology competencies have negative, low and very low positive relationship with their job performance with proxies as tasks and contextual performance in State owned universities in Rivers State. It can be concluded also that information protection competencies as proxy of information management competency has very low positive relationship with office managers' job performance with proxies such as tasks and contextual performance in State owned universities in Rivers State.

It can also be concluded that except for the relationship between information protection competencies and contextual performance, there is no significant relationship between all proxies of information management competencies of office managers and their job performance in State owned universities in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions made, the following recommendations are put forward for implementation:

1. Administrators of State owned universities in Rivers State should organize workshop for office managers (secretaries) from time to time on information management best practices.
2. Administrators of State owned universities in Rivers State should provide information technology infrastructure such network connectivity, internet and intranet connecting departments to support office managers' utilization of information technology competencies to drive job performance.
3. Administrators of State owned universities should have in place a reward system that rewards office managers who use their knowledge and skills effectively and efficiently to drive their tasks performance and the general performance of the institution.
4. Rivers State government in collaboration with the institutional management should ensure that only job seekers who have demonstrated high level of information management competencies especially records management competencies, information technology and information protection are given the opportunity for employment as secretaries within the State owned universities.

5. Office information management educators should advocate and ensure the implementation of curriculum content that can enhance future graduates' information management competencies for office job performance.
6. Researchers in the area of information management should continue to investigate every aspects of office managers information management competencies and how it affects their job performance in order to make continuous recommendations capable of making this cadre of personnel globally competitive.

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