



ADAPTABILITY TO EVOLVING OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AMONGST OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY GRADUATES OF RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The study examined the adaptability to evolving office technology amongst Office Management and Technology (OMT) graduates of Rivers State Universities. The research design adopted in this study was the descriptive survey design. The sample of the study consisted of 85 OMT Graduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) and Rivers State University (RSU), Port Harcourt. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Adaptability to Evolving Office Technology (QUAOET)". A four-point rating scale of Very High Level (VHL) – 4 points, High Level (HL) – 3 points, Moderate Level (ML) – 2 points and Low Level (LL) -1 point was used to rate the responses, while the instrument was validated by three experts in Business Education. The reliability of the instrument was established by test-retest method, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and a correlation coefficient of .81 was obtained. The data obtained was analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while the null hypotheses were tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed high levels of change anticipation and adaption of evolving office technology amongst OMT graduates of Rivers State Universities. It was concluded that OMT graduates are adaptable to evolving office technology. The study recommended that OMT graduates should leverage the internet, for learning and monitoring technological developments and evolutions relevant to their field of work, while employers should make provision for frequent training and workshop sessions to keep employees abreast of new and evolving technologies such as available versions of software programmes and applications that may be applied to troubleshoot and carry out work procedures for better work efficiency.

Keywords: *Adaptability, Evolving Technology, Change, Office Management and Technology, Innovation.*



Introduction

The modern office outlook is one that is characterized by the use of modern technological tools that require an employee to develop both soft and hard skills to fully operate the office. An office may therefore be moderately or highly technology inclined, depending on its operations. Some common technologies used in the office are basic office machines such as computers, scanners, printers, photocopiers, telephone systems, internet facilities, Paper shredders, vending machines, document feeders, computer software, external storage devices, cloud/edge storage solutions, smart boards and projectors. Nowadays, modern technologies found in offices are far reaching and may include pens, wrist watches and glasses that could record meetings, chairs and tables that may be adjustable to a standing position, treadmill desks, 3D printers, and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) solutions such as Google Voice, Vonage, ooVoo, Viber, Skype, Facebook messenger, Team Talk, mumble, Discord and jitsi. Ahmed 2019 described the office as the hub of ideas that make a business unique, adding that an office is an extension of a brand, and not just a physical place where business activities take place. By this, office/secretarial duties may be carried out remotely over the phone and other mobile gadgets outside the regular office setting.

It is now obvious that technology and its advancement cannot be separated from the office scene. Koko and Dambo (2007) asserted that technology has come to stay and therefore concerns should be directed on how best to nurture and sustain it. According to Nakib (2012), technology is characterized by a continuous accelerating trend and its evolution springs from users' needs and the surrounding socio-cultural and demographic changes, market demands, climate variability, regulations, and aesthetic tendencies. Today's work environment is characterized by changing work patterns caused by technological dynamics and the need for adaptive workers has become increasingly high as well. (Pulako, Arad, Donovan & Plamondon, 2011). The OMT graduate who manages an office is therefore expected to develop skills to enable them adapt in changing technological environments and work patterns to survive in today's office setting, because, according to Akpomi and Ordu (2009) and Penkoski (2020), office technology and its successful use is only as good as the people behind it. Also, as the future of work evolves, higher value is placed on talent and reskilling, as human-centered design techniques are being combined with leading-edge technologies to create new interfaces that may move from keyboards to touchscreens, voice commands, and beyond. Therefore, the knowledge era compels OMT graduates to possess and develop creative skills and abilities to adapt to changing technology (Iwuoha and Ebenezer-Nwokeji, 2018).

The term Adaptability could generally be seen as the ability to adjust to changing circumstances. Dolata (2009) wrote that new technologies present opportunities for transformation which enable us to identify the technology-based pressure to change and adapt to the structural, institutional, and organizational changes, while adaptability helps us to detect, anticipate and adopt this technology-based pressure. According to Dolata, the interplay between evolving technology and adaptability creates transformation, through anticipative and smooth adoptions of change. Infact, Boss (2015) put it this way: the ability for workers and organizations to adapt to changes in their environments, stay relevant and avoid obsolescence is the defining characteristic between success and failure, growth and stagnation, business and bankruptcy. He added that adaptable people are those who anticipate change, accept change, experiment, are optimistic, do not complain and blame, are



curious, open minded and stay up to date with current trends. Cleverism (2019) referred to adaptability as a natural and necessary skill which enables a person to change his actions or approach to doing things in order to suit new situations, or being able to effect changes in a course of action with smoothness and timeliness, without any major setbacks. EmployeePedia (2017) described adaptability as the ability to adjust to unexpected situations in the environment and staying connected with a positive attitude. (Fiorentino 2019) also defined adaptability as a personality trait that describes how a person relates to and interacts with changes in the world around them and how it affects job performance. To Burns, William and Freeman (2010) adaptability is developed not only through training, but also through education and experience. In their report, training, education, and career development is the key to producing more adaptable individuals and, through them, more adaptable organizations and institutions that will foster and sustain adaptability as a valued competency. EmployeePedia (2017) mentioned that, to achieve adaptability, goals have to be set for the employees and these goals that may help achieve employee adaptability include: Learn new tricks and techniques that help build confidence, look for new ways of handling multiple tasks and tolerating time pressures, show willingness to learn new skills that increase efficiency through self-development seminars and trainings, learn to accept all types of change in workloads and changing environments, think creatively outside job descriptions, explore new avenues, prioritize and innovate methods to handle new tasks and challenges.

Amesi, Akpomi and Okwuanaso (2014) proposed the “learning by inquiry” strategy, which focuses on developing skills through observing and eventually by practicing. This strategy may be tied to attachment to professionals or on-the-job training. According to the authors, Information and Communication Technology learning and acquaintance for the work place may begin with students’ industrial attachment/training. Mercer (2019) highlighted that with the accelerating pace of technological change, many employees find themselves rushing to keep up with new software, programs and technological processes implemented in the workplace, so that even young employees who enter the workplace with advanced technological skills can find themselves quickly falling behind the technological curve. Mercer therefore proposed regular and continuous technological training as the way out of being left behind but staying ahead of the curve instead. This in the opinion of Amesi, Akpomi and Okwuanaso (2014) should begin from when the OMT graduates are still in school. Amesi and Akpomi (2014) also proposed the mentoring strategy as an approach to people and professional development through formal trainings for new and existing employees on the job. TekPartners (2017) warned that, because globalization and technologies have created a need for organizations to find new methods of operating efficiently, employees must also become flexible and find ways to evolve within their roles.

Technological evolution brings with it, new and challenging interfaces that require organizations to evolve along with it. Office Management and Technology is a programme that was generally designed to prepare students for secretarial employments which expose them to the use of technologies, but in contemporary times, the relevance of the secretarial profession has been questioned strongly, since new technologies are said to have reduced the secretary’s tasks, so that everyone is able to carry out secretarial functions with the help of technological applications. As a result, according to Olayanju (2016) the secretarial cadre in some offices in Nigeria is being phased out and some organizations do not replace any secretary that retires or dies while still on the job, neither do they advertise for employment in the secretarial cadre.



However, Ngwane and Ngwane (2015), citing the Durban University of Technology, South Africa, exposed a hope for the OMT graduates. He affirmed that OMT graduates are trained for and can easily secure national and international administrative positions such as: Personal Assistant, Executive Assistant, Office Co-ordinator, Office/Administrative Manager, Administrative posts in the fields of Human Resource, Legal and Accounting. Office managers as Sunday (2013) would refer to OMT graduates, are administrative assistants and could be employed in organizations of every type. They are employed in firms providing services ranging from education and health to legal and business services. Other firms where Office managers may be employed are manufacturing, construction, wholesale and retail trade, transportation, communication, banking, insurance investment, real estate firms, as well as Federal, State, and Local Government agencies.

This study is therefore targeted at OMT graduates who may be employed in any of the above listed positions and fields of work. This means that they are expected to carry out office operations using modern office technologies. For example; a Personal Assistant who may be used to corresponding with a head branch or a highly esteemed customer organization by email may, at some point be required to join an international video conference irrespective of one's location and time zone.

Patil and Pradhan (2020) informed that in the year 2020, a host of technological trends are poised for greater adoption; businesses across the globe need to anticipate technological evolutions that may affect business decisions. These changes include Artificial Intelligence (AI), Edge Computing, Automation, 5G, Cybersecurity and the Internet of Things (IoT). To face the uncertainties resulting from technological changes, organizations need to build a culture and capacity for innovation, recognize the impact of new technologies and have the foresight to incorporate appropriate new technologies in advance of negative impacts resulting from technological change. Boss (2015) identified a common unwillingness to adopt change simply because of the newness surrounding it. This unwillingness according to the author typically stems from lack of self/situational awareness, poor communication, decisions, lack of accountability, etc.

Statement of the Problem

In modern days, it is uncommon to find non-computerized offices. Moreso, technologies used for information and knowledge processing, storage, retrieval and sharing, goods and services production, advertising, marketing, selling and even internet usage are bound to change. As they change, they create alongside, a need for change/upgrade in skills, methods and processes by which work is done. OMT graduates who occupy positions such as Secretary, Personal Assistant, Office Assistant and administrative officer are expected to change alongside. Research has revealed that, often, people resist automation and new technologies for fear being redundant, fear of increased responsibilities and work demands, fear of commitments and fear of loss of job due to incompetence. (Robbins 2014; Boss, 2015 & Bayerl, 2017), From the look of technological growth, evolution pace and acceptance, technology has come to stay with us. Therefore this study sought to answer the question: What is the level of adaptability of OMT graduates of Rivers State Universities to evolving technologies in their work environments?



Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the level of adaptability to evolving office technology amongst OMT graduates of Rivers State Universities. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the level of change anticipation in evolving office technology amongst OMT graduates of Rivers State Universities.
2. Determine the level of adaptation to evolving office technology amongst OMT graduates of Rivers State Universities.

Research questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What is the level of change anticipation in evolving office technology amongst OMT graduates of Rivers State Universities?
2. What is the level of adaptation to evolving office technology amongst OMT graduates of Rivers State Universities?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of OMT graduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University on the level of change anticipation in evolving office technology.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of OMT graduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University on the level of adaptation to evolving office technology.

Method

The research design adopted in this study is the descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted 60 Office Management and Technology graduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt (IAUE) and 25 Office Management and Technology graduates of Rivers State University, Port Harcourt (RSU), who are currently postgraduate students in OMT and are expected to hold positions in the mentioned areas. The population sums to 85 OMT graduates in the 2016/2017 academic session. The entire population was adopted as the sample since the number was manageable. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Adaptability to Evolving Office Technology (QUAEOT)". The questionnaire contained 10 items in relation to the research questions. A four-point rating scale of Very High Level (VHL) – 4 points, High Level (HL) – 3 points, Moderate Level (ML) – 2 points and Low Level (LL) -1 point was used to rate the responses. The instrument was validated by three experts in Business Education. The reliability of the instrument was established by test-retest method, using Pearson Product



Moment Correlation and a correlation coefficient of .81 was obtained. The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researcher, with the help of research assistants. 71 copies of the instrument were completed and used for the study; 52 Copies from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt (IAUE) and 19 from Rivers State University (RSU), Port Harcourt were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions; a mean score of 2.50 was used as the benchmark for acceptance, all mean scores higher than the benchmark of 2.50 represent high level, while mean scores lower than the benchmark of 2.50 represent low level. The null hypotheses were tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the level of change anticipation in evolving office technology amongst Office Management and Technology graduates of Rivers State Universities?

Table 1: Mean ratings on the level of change anticipation in evolving office technology amongst Office Management and Technology graduates of Rivers State Universities.

N=71

S/N	STATEMENTS	IAUOE		RSU		GM	Remark
		X̄	SD	X̄	SD		
	The following statements describe my change anticipation level at work:	52		19			
		X̄	SD	X̄	SD		
1	Curiosity to learn new things.	2.87	1.69	3.16	1.78	3.01	HL
2	Browsing the internet, reading websites and publications to learn and monitor technological developments relevant to my field of work.	2.38	1.54	2.42	1.56	2.40	LL
3	Seeking information on new technologies that that have been introduced.	2.46	1.57	2.47	1.58	2.47	LL
4	Asking your IT Support Assistant to teach you how to troubleshoot to solve minor problems.	3.12	1.77	3.42	1.85	3.27	HL
5	Asking your Technical Team to explain new developments in technology and how they affect your work.	2.75	1.66	2.63	1.62	2.69	HL



6	Sourcing for trainings and workshops within and outside the organisation and seek possibilities of attending.	2.67	1.63	2.95	1.72	2.81	HL
	Total Mean/SD	16.25	9.86	17.05	10.11	16.65	
	Grand Mean/SD	2.71	1.64	2.84	1.69	2.78	HL

Source: Field data 2020.

The data in table 1 showed that statements 1, 4, 5, and 6, with mean scores of 3.01, 3.27, 2.69 and 2.81 were rated high. On the other hand, statements 2 and 3 with mean scores of 2.40 and 2.47 respectively were rated low. The grand mean of 2.78 however, revealed a high level of change anticipation in evolving office technology amongst Office Management and Technology graduates of Rivers State Universities.

Research Question 2

What is the level of adaptation to evolving office technology amongst Office Management and Technology graduates of Rivers State Universities?

Table 2: Mean ratings on the level of adaptation to evolving office technology amongst Office Management and Technology graduates of Rivers State Universities.

S/N	STATEMENTS	IAUOE		RSU		GM	Remark
		X̄	SD	X̄	SD		
	The following statements describe my level of adaptation to evolving office technology at work:	52		19			
7	Application of newly learned technical skills to improve job efficiency.	2.87	1.69	3.21	1.79	3.04	HL
8	Explore available versions of programmes/applications and adopt the best option to manage work activities.	2.31	1.52	2.26	1.5	2.29	LL
9	Ability to study and work with new technological equipment for new or changing work procedures.	2.55	1.6	2.58	1.61	2.56	HL



10	Having a positive attitude towards changing office patterns and technological interface	2.55	1.59	2.58	1.61	2.56	HL
11	Avoid job responsibilities when they involve the use of new technologies	2.48	1.58	2.0	1.41	2.24	LL
Total Mean/SD		12.76	7.98	12.63	7.92	12.69	
Grand Mean/SD		2.55	1.60	2.53	1.58	2.54	HL

Source: Field data 2020.

The data in table 2 showed that statements 7, 9, and 10, with mean scores of 3.04, 2.56 and 2.56 respectively were rated high. While statements 8 and 11 with mean scores of 2.29 and 2.24 revealed a low level exploration and adaptation of available versions of programmes/applications to manage work activities. Statement 11, which has to do with avoiding job responsibilities when it involves the use of new technologies was also rated low. The grand mean of 2.54 eventually revealed a high level of adaptation to evolving office technology amongst Office Management and Technology graduates of Rivers State Universities.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Office Management and Technology graduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University on the level of change anticipation in evolving office technology.

Table 3: t-test result of the difference in mean ratings of Office Management and Technology graduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University on the level of change anticipation in evolving office technology

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	L/significance	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
IAUE	52	2.71	1.64	69	.05	-0.29	1.98	Accepted
RSU	19	2.84	1.69					

Source: Field data 2020.

The result in table 3 shows that at degree of freedom 69 and level of significance of 0.05, the T-calculated value of -0.29 is less than the t-critical value of 1.98. Thus hypothesis 1 is accepted, meaning that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Office Management and Technology graduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University on the level of change anticipation in evolving office technology.



Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Office Management and Technology graduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University on the level of adaptation to evolving office technology.

Table 4: t-test result of the difference in mean ratings of Office Management and Technology graduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University on the level of adaptation of evolving office technology

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	L/significance	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
IAUE	52	2.55	1.60	69	.05	0.05	1.98	Accepted
RSU	19	2.53	1.58					

Source: Field data 2020.

The result in table 4 shows that at degree of freedom 69 and level of significance of 0.05, the T-calculated value of 0.05 is less than the t-critical value of 1.98. Thus hypothesis 1 is accepted, meaning that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Office Management and Technology graduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University on the level of adaptation to evolving office technology.

Discussion of Findings

The findings on Research Question 1 with respect to the level of change anticipation in evolving office technology amongst Office Management and Technology graduates of Rivers State Universities revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the respondent groups. The study revealed a high level of curiosity to learn new things and a high dependence on technical or IT support assistants to learn about evolving technologies relating to their field of work and to troubleshoot to solve minor problems at work, rather than browse the internet to get information on websites and publications to learn new technological developments that have been introduced. This finding supports the interpretation of Boss (2015) that adaptable people are those who anticipate change, accept change, experiment, are optimistic, curious, open minded and stay up to date with current trends. The study is also in line with EmployeePedia (2017) who mentioned that Office Management and Technology graduates should exhibit qualities and ability to learn new tricks and techniques of handling multiple tasks, Show willingness to learn new skills that increase work efficiency and accept change in workloads and work environments as adaptable employees.

The findings on Research Question 2 with respect to the level of adaptation to evolving office technology amongst Office Management and Technology graduates of Rivers State Universities also revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the respondent groups. Findings revealed a high level of applicability of newly learned skills, high level ability to work with new technological equipment for changing work procedures and a high level of positive attitude towards evolving technological interfaces. The study also found a low level avoidance of job responsibilities due to involvement of new technologies. This is a positive outcome which depicts a high level of adaptation to evolving office technology amongst OMT graduates. This finding does not correspond with Robbins (2014) and Boss (2015), who identified a common unwillingness and resistance of new technologies amongst administrative employees to adopt change simply because of the newness surrounding it, or



for fear being redundant, fear of increased responsibilities and work demands, fear of commitments, fear of loss of job due to incompetence, etc. TekPartners (2017) however updated that, because globalization and technologies have created a need for organizations to find new methods of operating efficiently, employees are also finding ways to become flexible and evolve within their roles. Also, Mercer (2019) highlighted that with the accelerating pace of technological change, many employees find themselves rushing to keep up with new software, programs and technological processes implemented in the workplace.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that Office Management and Technology graduates of Rivers State Universities are adaptable to evolving office technologies, showing high levels of change anticipation and adaptation to evolving office technologies for enhancing work efficiency.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Office Management and Technology graduates should leverage the internet, knowing that the world is at a speed age and regular browsing of the internet, reading websites and technological publications to learn and monitor technological developments and evolutions relevant to their field of work is highly needed in order to remain in the technological curve.
2. Since study has shown that workers would rather seek knowledge of technological developments and skills through trainings and workshops received from within or outside the organization, employers should make provision for frequent training and workshop sessions to keep employees abreast of new and evolving technologies such as available versions of software programmes and applications that may be applied to troubleshoot and carry out work procedures for better work efficiency.

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