An Appraisal of Effectiveness of Information Communication Technology in Office Management in the COVID-19 Era

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Abstract
A well-organised and well-managed office is an important prerequisite for any thriving organisation. During the early months of 2020, the world experienced a health catastrophe, the Corona Virus pandemic, known as the COVID-19. This pandemic impacted the lives of everyone in the world. The world practically shut down as social distancing measures, including lockdown, were declared in almost all countries. These measures had a significant effect on the physical, financial, and economic health of every country. It also brought about a paradigm shift in the culture of office management in organisations. This research examined the increased role of ICTs in office management in the COVID-19 era. The study found that ICTs have continued to play an increasingly critical and pivotal role in recent office management designs of organisations. Remote working has become a norm as ICTs made the phrase "working from home" become a catch phrase. Several organisations resorted to working remotely in compliance with worldwide safety regulations, using ICTs to remain profitable and in existence. Though the world is no longer in lockdown, it can be said that the culture of work has changed. Remote working has come to stay. Hence, the importance of ICTs to the survival of businesses cannot be over emphasized. Office management in organisations must thus take this into cognizance and design their structures accordingly to be able to effectively and efficiently achieve set objectives.
Keywords: *COVID-19, ICT, Office operations, Office management, Operations management*

I. Introduction

Office management is concerned with the efficient and effective performance of office work. It has been defined as the distinct process of planning, organising, staffing, directing, coordinating, and controlling an office to facilitate the achievement of set objectives of any business organisation. An office is a crucial and essential part of every organisation, whether large or small. The success of a business depends upon the efficiency and effectiveness of its office.

The office is a place where different activities of a business organisation are performed. It is the brain of the whole organisation (Upadhyay, Ladhe, Rai, Bhatkar & Upadhyay, 2015). The office performs clerical functions such as information collection, record analysis, information dissemination and distribution, and administrative functions including planning, policies formulation and implementation, coordinating, organisation, and directing. It is, hence, the nervous system of every operation within a business organisation. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be broadly defined as the means of creation, storage, management, and dissemination of information by electronic means. These are the technologies that allow for the handling of information and the facilitation of various forms of communication. ICT is important to the survival of any organisation as it enhances performance, builds capacity, improves learning processes, connects processes, and improves communication. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. COVID-19 was a global, transnational health threat. By June 2020, the pandemic had spread to over 200 countries, infecting over seven million people, and had become a global epidemic causing fundamental societal changes (Shengnan, Y. et al, 2020). Not only did the crisis challenge the public health system in each country, but it also, more broadly, shook up the norm, the social order.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on health, economy, and society, causing difficulties and uncertainty for the lives of many people in several areas all over the world. The security measures adopted by the governments, aimed at managing the spread of the virus and protecting the health of their citizens, as far as possible, mostly included social distancing, wearing of masks, washing or sanitizing of hands, and getting vaccinated against the virus.People were overwhelmed with information and misinformation and their daily lives changed under these measures. The stay-at-home order and encouragement to practice social distancing to curb the COVID-19 pandemic had a great effect on how work is being carried out, in both private and public organisations. It affected office management designs as organisations struggle to find means of staying afloat and achieving setobjectives. Office management in organisations had to consider other means by which employees can fulfill their work responsibilities and obligations. They had to resort to teleworking and remote working, using ICT (Diane, J, et al, 2020; Ragu-Nathan, et al, 2008). The number and frequency of individuals who had to work from home and reliance on ICT to get work done increased exponentially.

Furthermore, the process of communication, interaction, and provision of support to employees have drastically changed. This paper seeks to examine the effect of ICT on office management in organisations, and governments around the globe in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Clarification
Office and Office Management
An office is the centre point of any organisation. It is an integral part of any organisation or institution, which has equal importance in the government sector as well as in the private sector. The presence of an office is vital for the proper functioning of any kind of organisation. Office management is concerned with the efficient and effective performance of office work and involves the technique of planning, organising, coordinating, and controlling office activities to achieve business objectives. The efficiency of a company's office is critical to its success.This includes creating a focused work environment, coordinating and guiding the activities of employees to achieve organisational goals.Work activities are evaluated and adjusted to maintain employees' satisfaction and improve efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity. When a company is properly managed, it has control over its office activities, lowers its costs, and has happy employees, and coordination of organisational activities (Boyarsky, 2022). Office management is important as it helps in the achievement of organisational goals, optimum use of resources, reduction of operational costs, smooth flow of work, retention oftalents and inculcation of a sense of loyalty, increased profit and efficiency, survival, and growth.

Key Office Management Functions
Planning: Planning is the process of dealing with what needs to be done ahead of time. It is the first fundamental step towards efficient operations and facilitating control. It is a process of creating a structure of the duties required to attain the organisational goals and objectives. Short and long-term organisational goals are recognized and plans are made to achieve them.
Organising: Organising is the process of combining the efforts of individuals or groups of people in order to achieve the desired results. Organising works hand in hand with planning towards achieving organisational goals. It involves coordinating and delegating tasks to appropriate employees to keep these resources moving towards planned goals.
Staffing: Staffing refers to the employment or recruitment of the appropriate persons into various jobs positions by their qualifications, capabilities, and skills. Staffing includes all matters of staff selection, recruitment, remuneration, training, development, compensation, promotion, and retirement of employees.
Directing: The manners and ways in which administrators and employers provide directions to their subordinates are referred to as "directing." Their primary goal is to guide subordinates in the right direction. It entails things like leadership, communication, and supervision.
Communication and ICT: Effective communication is a staple of any high-functioning organisation. The process of transferring information from one person to another is known as communication. There are various modes of communication, including oral, written, and technological devices. Speaking, listening, and responding are all aspects of communication. The organisation's needs must be properly articulated, communicated to, and understood by its employees, to achieve optimum efficiency. Information communication technologies ICT are now being used quite a lot on organisational jobs. Software is used for day-to-day roles and other technologies are used for the efficient running of day-to-day activities for employees.
Motivating: Motivating is the process of enhancing an individual to perform, work, and take action in order to achieve a specific goal. Motivating is a highly complex aspect of office management that can be divided into two types: self-motivation and external motivation. When employees are not self-motivated, they have to be externally motivated. Motivation should satisfy the employees' needs while being competitive, productive, and comprehensive. It will result in high morale, and would likely improve employee performance.

Coordinating: It entails monitoring, balancing, and keeping the team together by ensuring appropriate task and work allocation to various members based on their skills and abilities. It is also important under this function to ensure that tasks are completed with consensus among the members themselves. The workforce employed within an organisation should be synchronised.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is defined as the technology which involves the creation, manipulation, storage, and communication of information, together with related methods, management, and application (Amaewhule & Appah, 2019). This implies that ICT refers to the recording, storing, processing, retrieving, and transmitting of information using technological facilities (Dambo & Wokocha, 2020). It is further defined as the acquisition, processing, storage, and dissemination of vocal, pictorial, textual, and numerical data through a micro electronics-based combination of computing and telecommunication (Shaibu, Oshiogwe & Mbaegbu, 2014). Therefore, ICT is the concept that describes technologies that are used for accumulating, storing, editing and passing on information in various forms. The preceding definition distinguishes distinct fields of ICT while also connecting them to function as a single entity (Kundishora, 2017).

ICT is broadly defined here to include the internet, networks, platforms, applications, phones, and databases, as well as their underlying infrastructure, and are seen as a pivotal factor in the existing social order which became more important to maintain social order during the COVID 19 global pandemic (Wilson & Jumbert, 2018). ICT could also be referred to as all forms of the electronic system that are used for broadcasting, telecommunications, and all kinds of computer-mediated communications. Its components are those aspects or parts of the information technology that when integrated, make up the functionality or effectiveness of the system. That means they are parts that make up the complete system. These components include computer hardware, computer software, databases, telecommunications, data warehouses, human resources, and procedures (Gregersen, 2021).

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) explained that Corona Viruses are a large family of viruses that are common in animals and may cause illness in animals, including humans. Several corona viruses are known to cause respiratory infections in humans, ranging from the common cold to more serious diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) (SARS). In 2019, the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2020) propagates the view that COVID-19 poses a great and unequal economic impact on some fractions of a given population bringing about the feeling of inequality among members of the society. These groups of the labour force that are economically propagated by ILO (2020) specifically include workers with underlying health conditions, young persons who already face higher rates of unemployment, older workers who may face a higher risk of developing serious health issues, women who are over-represented in occupations that are at the front line of dealing with the pandemic, unprotected workers and migrant workers.

The World Health Organisation, WHO (2020) recommended that, and International Labour Organisation, ILO (2020) also suggested that for the prevention of COVID-19, individuals should practise physical/social distancing, maintain good hygiene practices, regularly clean surfaces, use personal protective equipment (PPE),and take vaccinations. This has impacted greatly people's daily lives all over the world. Not only did the COVID-19 pandemic challenge the public health system in each country, but it also, more broadly, shook up the social order, affecting almost everything about human lives and activities.

Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on the Structuration Theory of Information Technology. This theory holds that human actions as well as the social structure shape social phenomena (Veenstra, Melin, &Axelsson, 2014). The original theory of organisational structuration was posited by Giddens, (1976) that individuals' everyday actions are organised by structures that serve as the fabric of the society. These structures, embodied by rules and norms, are produced and reproduced by those who act within them, as actors' proclivity to follow norms frequently results in rule-following actions (Giddens, 1976). It asserts that patterns of interaction within organisations create a duality of structure in which employees who follow organisational norms communicate meaning and power through interactions with other organisational members.

The present study is based on this theory. When information technology system is adopted in an organisation, decisions are made easily as the decision support system of the organisation is premised on the capacity of the office management and the imperative information technology infrastructure available and utilized efficiently. This position was corroborated in the study of Jackson, Young & Sander (2020).

Empirical Review

Dambo and Wokocha (2020) studied assessing the integration of new office technologies in Rivers State public service administration. The research examined how new office technologies were being integrated into Rivers State public service administration. For the study, a descriptive survey research design was used. The results reveal a medium level of Executive Administrators' knowledge of the new office technologies and a low level of Executive Administrators' use of new office technologies in Rivers State Public Service administration. The study recommends that the government ensure the training and retraining of officers from Ministries and Agencies on cutting-edge office technologies in order to increase their knowledge of efficient usage and improve service delivery in the public sector.

Békés and Aafjes-van Doorn (2020) studied psychotherapists' attitudes toward online therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study evaluated at how psychotherapists' attitudes toward online psychotherapy are influenced by their personal characteristics and professional experiences during the pandemic's abrupt transition from face-to-face to online psychotherapy. The analysis revealed that psychotherapists' attitudes toward online psychotherapy are influenced by their previous experiences, such as their psychotherapy modality, clinical experience, and previous online psychotherapy experience, as well as their transition experience during the pandemic and geographic location. The study concluded that this forced transition to online psychotherapy caused by the COVID-19 epidemic might turn out to have some silver lining.

Farkas and Romaniuk (2020) assessed the challenges and innovations for each social work core value and presented ideas for innovation and adaptation suited to these times. The study found out the challenges and innovations using examples of two community agencies providing services to people who are homeless and addicted. The study suggested that the social work profession must continue to advocate for policies and programs that will meet emerging needs and will prepare society for the next natural disaster or pandemic that puts vulnerable lives at risk.

Olwill, Nally, and Douglas (2020) studied a psychiatrist's experience of remote consultations by telephone in an outpatient psychiatric department during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study examined a group of Irish psychiatrists' experience of remote consultations. The study adopted a survey research design. The study established that many of the psychiatrists noted an increased difficulty carrying out assessments and decreased confidence in diagnosis has implications for service development at our clinical site. The study suggested that it is likely that the innovative use of a combination of face-to-face and telephone consultation may be necessary to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19, whilst providing optimal patient care and assessment.

Yang, Fichman, Zhu, Sanfilippo, Li and Fleischmann (2020) studied the use of ICT during COVID-19. The study assessed how different actors, such as individuals, nonprofit organisations, and governments, used ICTs to respond to the COVID crisis around the world. The study addressed three critical questions regarding ICTs and the global crisis. First and foremost, what role do ICTs play in a global crisis? Second, how do information and communication technologies affect social order when tensions between control, autonomy, and power shift? Third, what are the technical and philosophical implications of using ICT in the midst of a global health crisis? The study reviewed ongoing research in social informatics or health informatics as it relates to the panel theme and central questions in order to provide a comprehensive view of ICTs' role during this global pandemic.

Amaewhule and Appah (2019) studied the use of information and communication technology for job delivery by business educators in Rivers State's tertiary institutions. The study examined the extent of utilization of Information and Communication Technology for job delivery by a business educator in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study revealed that though business education lecturers utilize Information and Communications Technology, they are yet to fully utilize Information and Communications Technology in all aspects of business education delivery due to certain challenges. The study, therefore, recommended several strategies that will enhance the utilization of Information and Communications Technology for the delivery of business education by lecturers in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Wilson and Jumbert (2018) studied the new informatics of pandemic response: humanitarian technology, efficiency, and a national agency's subtle retreat The study specifically established how the use of new communication technologies in pandemic response is frequently supplemented by an influx of new actors and the convergence of previously separated activities within single technological platforms or institutional operations. The paper delves at how digital technologies have been used in humanitarian pandemic response. According to the study, prominent humanitarian coordination bodies with significant experience using digital communication technologies and interacting with the novel actors they introduce should facilitate structured interaction between these actors and representatives of national authorities in order to identify good practises for reinforcing national agency in digitally-driven informatics.

Ragu-Nathan, Tarafdar, Ragu-Nathan, and Tu (2008) studied the conceptual development and empirical validation of the consequences of technostress for end users in organisations. The study investigated the phenomenon of technostress, or stress experienced by end-users of Information and Communication

Technologies (ICTs) and its impact on job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and intention to stay. The study found that technostress creators reduce job satisfaction, which leads to lower organisational and long-term commitment, whereas technostress inhibitors increase job satisfaction and organisational and long-term commitment. The study concluded that technostress is a significant side effect of the unavoidable use of ICTs in organisations, demonstrating the dual nature of their organisational influence.

III. Methodology

This study follows the conceptual research approach which focuses on examining the existing data established by seasoned academics on the issue under evaluation. Documents reviewed comprise books, journals, reports, articles, and websites in Nigeria and abroad. This study adopts the documents review method exploring the use of books, journals, reports, and websites in Nigeria and abroad. This allows for the gathering of relevant information on the subject matter based on the existing literature.

IV. Discussion of Findings

Office Management and ICT in the COVID-19Era

Several countries felt the urgent need to curb the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health of their citizens and as such declared severe measures of restrictions, which included total lockdown and social distancing, in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other measures declared included wearing masks, washing of hands, and use of sanitizers. These restrictions and measures required significant changes in the way most organisations operate (Galea et al. 2020). It mostly affected the world-wide practised, normal, physical face to face, 9-5pm work culture. For example, the government in Ontario Canada, on March 24, 2020, ordered the mandatory closure of all non-essential workplaces to fight the spread of COVID-19 (Office of the Premier, 2020).

In response to this, all organisations, including government, regulatory bodies and licensing boards, and private, had to resort to other means by which their employees can continue to carry out their job responsibilities and make the business keep being a going concern. They had to resort to the use of ICTs in conjunction with coordination from offices to continue their operations, achieve organisational objectives, and survive the challenges of the pandemic (Wallace et al. 2020). For instance, the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW, 2020) advised members to consider offering services via any electronic device (e.g., a computer, smartphone, or landline) or electronic format (e.g., Internet, social media, chat, email, text, video).

By implication, the shift to electronic means of service provision in organisations happened very quickly (Békés & Doorn, 2020; Olwill, McNally & Douglas 2020; Razai et al. 2020; Walter-McCabe, 2020). With virtually no notice, employees were required to transition from face-to-face services to using ICT means in all communication with clients. Without proper training or support on providing this treatment (Békés & Doorn, 2020), employers were left with many questions about how they can appropriately use these technologies to bridge the gap caused by COVID-19 restrictions (Wright & Caudill, 2020). It became apparent that the office management of every organisation have to rise to the challenge, provide the necessary support, such as training, hardware, and software, and redesign their key functions in such a way to continue to efficiently and effectively manage the organisations towards achieving set objectives. Employees have also demonstrated a great deal of creativity in their use of ICTs to deliver services and maintain relationships with clients, to continue to provide these services, ensure profitability and survival of their organisation (Boahen, 2020; Farkas & Romaniuk, 2020; Galea et al. 2020).

ICT became increasingly pivotal for the continued provision of services and survival of organisations during the pandemic, as its apparatuses were relied upon. It was then realized that the importance of ICT goes beyond identifying, tracking, comprehending, managing, treating, and comprehending pandemics (Wilson & Jumbert, 2018). It, more fundamentally, gave organisations the best chance to maintain social order and existence as the pandemic goes on. The role of office management shifted to recognize that work must go on, be done remotely, and mostly from home. As such new strategies and designs were developed to achieve this. ICT professionals were engaged and tasked with conducting research, developing new and improving old software and applications which could significantly enhance remote working. The concept of office management changed to accommodate remote working and coordinating over the telephone and through the internet for the efficient and effective running of business organisations. Acquisition of necessary applications, software, and hardware that would enhance these organisational performances were acquired, such as laptops, internet, meeting platforms and subscriptions, high-quality mobile telephones, etc.

On the positive side, office management processes improved as the widespread support and use of ICTs allowed for more flexibility and innovations in work situations. A survey of over 15,000 professionals from 80 countries conducted by International Workplace Group (IPG), a flexible workspace company, revealed that employers have recognised the value of workplace flexibility for employees. Simultaneously, the adoption of

ICTs facilitated faster responses by facilitating mass collaboration and large-scale participation across state and national boundaries. This includes, for example, incorporating new entities into existing humanitarian collaborative effort networks (e.g., volunteer and technical societies that assist during crises, including pandemics); supporting new forms of disaster relief activities (e.g., digital humanitarians, online self-help groups); and allowing diverse civic participation (e.g., digital records of deleted posts to counter censorship, efforts to counter disinformation campaigns).

Increased reliance on ICTs brought about long-term benefits to both employees and the employers, the organisations. In simple words, it gives a win-win situation for both sides. The employees were able to save time and expense of commuting and have more time to spend with family, thus increasing their work-life balance. Organisations benefited from the business running round the clock, easy hiring of suitable candidates, minimal infrastructure costs amongst other benefits.

On the negative side, however, there is insufficient information for appropriate decision making, inability to properly monitor and coordinate employees, inability to still carry out some services which required physical interactions.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded that reliance on ICT increased exponentially during the COVID-19 global pandemic. ICT played a critical role in maintaining the social order and hasgreatly shaped the future of office management in organisations. The design and direction of office management in every organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic changed drastically. There was a paradigm shift in the functioning of organisations across the globe. The office had to start taking into consideration its environment and understand the new developments such as working remotely and working from home. Office management had to now be flexible and be willing to manage changes effectively and efficiently so that their organisation can survive the imminent crisis and remain a vibrant, profitable going concern.

Additionally, office management in organisations will have to devise new employment policies to align with the new norm, that is the increased reliance on ICT to carry out work. These policies would affect areas such as a new letter of intent with new terms and conditions, revised holidays and travel allowances, working hours policy, protection of company data, engagement and motivation of employees, and finally, disbursement of incentives and bonuses.

To make this paradigm shift a success, organisationsmust come up with the implementation and establishment of new policies and procedures.The office management of any organisation needs to understand its key functions and business activities. They mustimplement processes and plansin a well-coordinated and organised manner, All tasks, operations, and activities within the office should be carried out while keeping the organisation 's goals and the workforce's needs in mind.

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