

DIGITAL EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS REQUIRED BY OFFICE MANAGERS IN THE ELECTRONIC OFFICE

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Abstract

The office of today has gone digital unconsciously by the application of digital equipment being used in our offices presently. Today's offices are surrounded by digital office equipment like computers, scanners, photocopiers, laminating machines etc. These make the office electronic and require skills to operate them for maximum productivity. Employers of labour are presently on the lookout for future office managers who possess digital employability skills for optimum productivity in business organizations. This paper tends to identify digital employability skills required from Office Managers for optimum productivity in business organizations. Digital employability skills required by future secretaries for optimum productivity include: electronic record management, operations of digital office equipment, keyboarding skills, MS words skills etc. The paper recommends that training institutions should be adequately funded to enable them to install modern ICT equipment for effective training and proper acquisition of manipulative skills of ICT equipment, short training programmes should be organized for office managers at intervals to enable them to keep abreast of new technologies in the office among others.

Key words: Employability, Office Managers, Skills, electronic office

Introduction

The office of today has gone digital unconsciously by the application of digital equipment being used in our offices presently. Today's offices are surrounded by digital office equipment like computers, scanners, photocopiers, laminating machines etc. These make an office digital and it requires office managers with relevant digital skills to operate them for maximum productivity. Employers of labour are presently on the lookout for future office managers who possess digital employability skills for optimum productivity in business organizations. This paper therefore, tends to identify digital employability skills required from Office Managers for optimum productivity in business organizations.

Disruptive innovation and new opportunities and challenges in the world of work are some of the examples of the impact of the fourth industrial revolution. Today, organizations have moved forward using digital technologies such as the internet of things, artificial intelligence and big data. Many jobs will automatically be with digital technologies, (Manyika, Lund, Chui, Woetzel, Batara and Sanghvi, 2017).

Manyika et al assert that less than 5 percent of jobs will be fully automated; however, about 60 percent of work will be semi automated. Manyika et al further state that over the next few years, the employment landscape will change, with the world of work emphasizing the importance of digital employability skills as regards the employment of secretaries.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019), assert that occupation specific skills are no longer sufficient for graduates of Office Technology and Management to meet the needs of digital world of work, and that, it takes a set of employability skills. Employability skills and qualifications will be able to contribute positively in the digital age workplace. Many jobs in the digital business will be required to have more complex skills known as employability skills. These skills are personal qualities that make people employable. They are sometimes referred to as soft skills, transferable or non technical skills because they are different from technical knowledge and skills and can be applied to almost any job in any industry (Keremerer, Hayes, Abran, Dumke 2016). These are the type of knowledge that has to do with creativity of an individual in searching for solutions to problems. Some individuals are so creative and believed that they can solve all technical problems so they apply their creativity in such situations just to get a positive result even when it is not in his or her fields of study. Demands of the new contexts and trends such as current day industry require OTM graduates who can fulfill the demands of the new contexts and trends, such as digital business.

Digital skills refer to the skills related to the use of technology. UK Study Centre (2021) citing UNESCO defined digital skills as those needed to “use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information”. Possessing digital skills is very essential to personal life, and in the workplace. With the remote work continuously on the rise and technology constantly changing, it is crucial to ensure that secretaries are effectively trained on the tools, technology, and digital skills to help them become successful in the office and at home. Therefore, training secretaries on digital skills is a key component in keeping up with this growth in remote working and the rapidly changing technology field.

Rae (2021) states that the nature of work continues to change with such things as distance working and automation increasingly a commonplace. The manpower needs of many businesses as well as the functions are also affected as machines now perform complex tasks with greater speed and accuracy than human beings. Future secretaries are expected to demonstrate technological competencies in their use of laptops, and smart devices to perform secretarial tasks on daily basis. Their in depth knowledge in the use of modern office equipment in the course of receiving and sending out information, fastest and reliable form is the most appropriate in the future office. The use of these technologies is expected to improve the job performance of OTM graduates generally and specifically in areas of record keeping,

memo writing, collaboration, image making, data sourcing, information dissemination, timely decision making process, e mailing, and data gathering.

The facts show that there is employability skill gap between those possessed by the graduates and those needed by the world of work (Osborn, 2021). Graduate employability has become one of the central issues since the last two decades. Most of the OTM graduates today cannot conveniently type 30 words per minutes in MS word. Most of them cannot work with excel, database, desktop publishing convincingly. To crown it all, majority still cannot operate office equipment like laminating, photocopier, scanner just to mention but a few. Training institutions need to make various efforts to meet the identified challenges one of which is by making a grand design to develop students' employability skills. The functions of the secretary has become broader in recent times. The secretaries' responsibilities in utilizing digital skills in the performance of their duties cannot be overemphasized. Ezeahurukwe, N.L and Omale A.M. (2017) stated that the duties of a secretary have gone beyond performing the normal daily official routines. According to the author, secretaries who work in today's automated office environment are expected to acquire digital skills in order to be proficient in their duties.

Although technology have revolutionized the traditional roles of secretaries, professional secretaries with digital skills are highly indispensable in any establishment since secretarial roles are the pivot of office activities.

Nnaji, F.O and Okoro, F. (2019), asserted that the efficiency and effectiveness of the secretary in every business organization depends largely on the availability of office technologies as well as digital skills and competencies of the secretary to handle these office technologies. The authors further stated that the current automated offices have made it that, for the secretary to be relevant and functional in the office of today and the future, she must be competent in manipulative technology, communication and professional skills. For future secretaries to thrive, certain skills are required for their effective operation. Hull in Ugwuanyi (2014) defined skill as manual dexterity through repetitive performance of an operation.

Digital Employability Skills Required By Future Secretaries for Optimum Productivity

Digital Employability Skills Required By Future Secretaries for Optimum Productivity Include:

- Electronic Record Management Skills:

An electronic record is a record that can be manipulated, transmitted or processed by a computer. It is written on magnetic or optical medium (including magnetic tapes, flashes, CD Roms, hard disks e.t.c) recorded in binary code, accessed using computer software and hardware. This can be easily manipulated either updated, edited, deleted e.t.c. Matić. (2018). Tafor, (2016) defines electronic records as that records that are dependable on

relevant machines for access or reading through computer software and hardware. McDonald, (2018) opined that an electronic record is an intangible soft record created, managed, shared and preserved through the usage of an information and communication Technology ICT System. The Author asserted that the term electronic records reflects the reality of today's world of work where most activities depend on the availability of machines. Electronic records management often referred to as ERM or Records Information Management (RIM) is an essential part of organizational business compliance effort.

The ability to digitize records saves time, money and physical space. Wamukoya and Mutula (2014), observed that lack of knowledge about electronic records keeping and management is a major obstacle in the employment of secretaries today and in the future. Records should always be available, protected and managed effectively so as to ensure effective performance of job in modern office. This according to the authors is true because records by their very nature provide proof of the activities of the organization or personnel records. Records support the effective and efficient management of establishment, therefore an indispensable skill required of future secretaries. Such skills required in record management include:

Ability to:

- write email,
- send an email,
- attach documents,
- upload documents,
- download documents,
- save mails/documents,
- print out mails/documents
- share documents
- convert PDF documents to MS words (PDF portable document format)
- convert MS words document to PDF
- Use computer software like, MS words, Excel Database, Webpage Design, Desktop publisher etc.

Digital Employability Skills Required By Future Secretaries For Manipulative Skills of ICT Equipment For Optimum Productivity In The Areas Of Office Machines Include:

Ability to:

- laminate documents
- scan documents
- photocopy documents
- spiral bind documents
- shred documents
- use comb binding machine etc

Digital Skills and the Future Office

Digital skills according to Quarto (2020), include the knowledge and ability to decide information needs from digital technology sources, and to properly use digital tools and facilities to input, access, organize, integrate and assess digital resources as well as to construct new knowledge. New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) (2021). New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) defines digital skills as the abilities necessary to understand, utilize, find, evaluate, navigate, share, and create content and making use of digital technologies and the Internet, with little or no assistance. Possessing digital skills is very important in today's modern business environment and the future workplace. Iberdrola (2021) claims that digital skills are not just about learning and developing technological skills but they also involve the acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, regulations and ethics about ICT so as to get the most out of technology. In addition, they involve thinking and the valuable use of the data obtained through the use of technology.

Digital skills are characterized as tasks or communications performed on digital devices where information is accessed and managed. Digital skills according to the World Bank in Umoru (2020), are separated into three, namely: basic, intermediate and advanced. UNESCO also divides digital skills into basic, generic and higher levels based on a digital skills framework. Basic digital skills are entry level practical skills needed to make elementary use of digital devices and applications, while intermediate digital skills are skills which assist a person to make essential and valuable use of online applications and services. Similarly, advanced digital skills are the group of skills that form the bases of specialist (ICT) occupations and professions.

In the future office, the use of paper may be a thing of the past, mobile devices and laptops may become a popular choice for many employers and employees. In the Federal Polytechnic Bauchi for instance invigilation timetables and examination timetable for student's examination are released and checked through mobile devices like android phones. This absolutely agrees with the above statement. According to Ugwuanyi (2014), the concept of the office of the future is more than just the space in which employees work it includes the culture and vibe of the office as well as the cognizance of the health and well being of all employees. This means, offices of tomorrow will consist of multifunctional spaces that can be utilized together for different purposes. The future work will be influenced by technological, generational and social shifts. Thus, the office of the future would encourage learning through unusual methods, appealing to all ages and adjusting to the changing times. This will allow for creativity, increased performance and encourage innovation. The future of employment will be a hybrid mix of office and home working. Workers will spend less time commuting and more time collaborating. This enable people in the future to split their time between working from home and going into the office.

Importance of employability Skills for Secretarial Profession and the Nature of Future Office Technology

It is the opinion of some Office professionals to do away with some courses in the OTM curriculum as a result of digitalization of the office. This should not be a reason for exclusion of first born courses of secretarial profession like Shorthand and Typewriting, rather a tool that empowers and helps to overcome difficulties and discover new opportunities and education in digital skills is, without doubt, the best way to overcome this challenge. Let therefore, be an effort to digitize the teaching and using of shorthand. Iberdrola (2021) notes that digitization is not adverse to social and economic progress but it brings prosperity, social equality and, ultimately, a more competitive economy. In the case of shorthand, the argument is that it is no longer used in the office. It should not be the problem of the profession rather the Chief Executives and Managers of today who cannot give dictations to their secretaries. Why crying for others? You can label your office items and even personal items with shorthand; it is not only during dictation in the offices that determine the usefulness of shorthand.

With digital revolution altering conventional workplace functions and designing new jobs, there is a pressing need for secretaries to develop and deepen their technical skills to advance work quality, drive creativity and stay employable. A secretary with a growth mindset will be able to plug the skills gap and creates more exciting employment opportunities for himself or herself in the future office. Osborn (2021) outlined the importance of digital skills to include increasing revenue; businesses building stronger customer relationships; having a competitive edge over competitors; providing new strategies and approaches to working; improving productivity and effectiveness, and better communication. FutureLearn (2020) stated that it boosts the career of those who want to embrace the flexibility of freelance work, enhances personal and professional skills that give more options for getting a job.

Digital employability Skills Training Needs of the 21st Century Secretaries

There are a huge variety of skills that can be considered as digital skills. UK Study Centre (2021) identifies the skills to include: skills to send emails securely, use email attachments, and post on social media; handle information and content, use search engines, understand that not all online content is reliable, access content across devices and on the cloud; set up accounts online, fill in online forms; find solutions to problems using tutorials/chat and improve productivity; and keep passwords secure, take precautions against viruses among others.

In their contributions, Doyle (2019), FutureLearn (2020), Iberdrola (2021), Digital Skill Global (2021) and Randstad (2021) discuss the employability digital skills needs of the 21st century secretaries under the following subheads:

Emailing Skill, Social Media Management Skill, Blogging Skill, Digital Marketing

and Social Marketing Skill, Mobile Skill, Business Data Analytical Skill, Coding Skill, Cloud Skill, and Artificial Intelligence Skill.

The 21st century skills are a set of abilities that students need to develop in order to succeed in the information age as office administrators. Like a force of nature, the digital age cannot be denied or stopped. According to Olaopa (2015), digital era has four very powerful qualities that will result in its ultimate triumph: decentralizing, globalizing, harmonizing, and empowering. The new and powerful tools that digitization is giving rise to is trending towards greater freedom, and a diminishing attachment to fixed structures which increasingly calls for ability to think entrepreneurially, combine things well and, in particular, manage oneself.

The first step in developing skills is for secretaries to understand the digital skills that are most applicable to them and their business because this skill will give secretaries' career staying power the moment they get a job; it reduces risk of automation. As the reliance on digital communication grows, secretaries must keep up with the skill demand. It is also imperative to note that with the ever evolving digital landscape, the skills requirements will only continue to change. It is significantly relevant for secretaries to arm themselves with the basic digital skills and continuously up skill themselves to keep pace with the latest developments.

CONCLUSION

The advent of Information and Communications Technology which has led to acquisition of digital skills has made it highly imperative for secretaries to update their digital professional skills. This has created more rooms for improvement in the future for secretaries who can acquire digital employable skills. It is therefore, concluded that technological revolution is creating new opportunities for secretaries with digital skills for those who are prepared to work in the future office.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Training institutions should be adequately funded to enable them install modern ICT equipment for effective training and proper acquisition of digital application skills.
2. Institutions offering OTM should expose their students to the manipulative aspect of the office automation so that the would be secretaries will fit into the 'dreamt' paperless office of tomorrow.
3. Short training programmes should be organized for office managers from time to time to enable Office Managers keep abreast of new technologies in the office.

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