Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Productivity of Office and Information Managers in some Organizations in Port Harcourt.

By

Tugbe, Nwenendah
Department of Office and Information Management
Faculty of Education
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
tugbenwenendah@yahoo.com
+2347033079238

&

G. C Chux-Nyeche, PhD,
Department of Office and Information Management
Faculty of Education
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused so much trouble to most economies across the globe. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic after realizing more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries across the world in March, 2020. Most businesses and industries around the world have been severely and negatively impacted by the outbreak, while emerging economy have suffered a grave setback. The effect on businesses and economies seems to influence the productivity level of workers especially office and information managers. This seminar paper observed the effects and impacts the pandemic had on the productivity level of the office and information managers. The worldwide lockdown of businesses and industries that were implemented and mandated to curb the spread of the virus generated a wide array of unique and fundamental challenges for both employees and employers across the globe. While COVID – 19 suddenly upended normal work routines in some industries, it also caused an acceleration of trends that were already ongoing involving the migration of work to online or virtual work

environment. The paper concluded that COVID-19 quickly accelerated the speed of changes associated with working outside of co-located offices. Many organizations were restructured due to the pandemic, workers were either retained or laid-off and the cost implications of these actions are likely to be immersed. However, there should be training and retraining of the office and information managers on the use of these new but underway trends (i.e. virtual work practices) so as to improve productivity and remain relevant in organizations.

Keywords: Effects, COVID 19 Pandemic, Productivity, Office and Information Managers.

Introduction

COVID-19 is both an international economic threat and a global health crisis. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is the illness that is caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS – CoV-2; formerly known as 2019-nCoV), which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubel Province, China. Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are normally transmitted between animals and people. It was first reported to WHO on the 31st of December, 2019 in Wuhan, China, (World Health Organization, 2020). COVID-19 affected and still affects different people in different ways. Apart from the attention paid to the outbreak in Nigeria by the government of the country, international community has paid close attention to China's actions to control the epidemic. Hence, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the 2019nCov epidemic a 'public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) (Chen, Qiang Zhang & Yang, 2020).

However, the Coronavirus pandemic is not only a pandemic with widespread impact, it is also changing our lives in new ways every day, but it does not have to mean the end of business productivity or employee/employer relationship (Bamberge & Bacharach, 20214). Many countries are mandating that companies send their employees home but working remotely can be a big transition not only to employees but the business too. But the good news is that there are lots of technology available to support and secure work at home. That is why Newark Bohns & Flynn (2017) opined that with the right solutions, you can go about

business as usual from home, even in the midst of a global quarantine. With the Coronavirus now labeled a global pandemic, businesses worldwide are scrambling to put safety first. Most businesses are gearing up to allow employees to work from home. Since office and information managers are the life wire of any organization, their performance as service providers to their bosses and colleagues in meeting their optimum required service delivery on a daily basis. There is the need for them to adapt to new ways of meeting required obligations to enhance productivity in the organization.

Cambridge Business English Dictionary sees information manager as a person who is responsible for the systems that provide information to the people in an organization and for protecting information that must be kept private. Whether it is email, web searching, managing an intranet or designing a website, internet technologies are the primary tools for information managers. Office and information managers are responsible for the efficient functioning of an office through a range of administrative, financial and managerial tasks, thereby making them work even in this period of COVID 19 pandemic from home and sometimes in the office as the case may be as they are the direct assistance to their boss. Effective managers hold themselves and others accountable. This means that office and information managers account for, report on and explain their actions and the use of human and financial resources entrusted to them, and they equally have clear sense of their personal values which serves as an internal compass for them, ensuring their actions are consistently aligned with their values (Tugbe, 2021).

Productivity is not everything but in the long run, it is almost everything. Productivity according to Dictionary.com is the quality, state or fact of being able to create, enhance or bring forth goods and services, making the task of office and information managers extremely important in any organization. Just as productivity is the state of being able to perform effectively, and particularly create at a high quality and quick speed, office and information managers should be up and doing and always on his/her duty post be it at home or at work place for effective productivity. Productivity is commonly defined as a ratio between the output volume and the volume of inputs. In other words, it measures how efficiently production inputs, such as labor and capital are being used in an

economy to produce a given level of output. Productivity is considered a key source of economic growth and competitiveness and as such, a basic statistical information for many international comparisons and country performance assessments, (Paul, 1994).

Objectives

Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the office and information manager
2. Ascertain the effects of and productivity level of the office and information manager
3. Determine the way forward on how the office and information manager can live and be productive in this COVID-19 pandemic era.

Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the office and information manager

The pandemic had negative effect on most office and information managers because most of them had to work from their homes, some were handicapped since they did not have adequate knowledge on the use of virtual environment, as such, could not work from their homes. The wellbeing of the office and information managers tend to decrease as their performance was directly related to their wellbeing. The fear associated with the pandemic weighed down on most office managers and this affected their productivity.

Productivity level of the office and information manager:

Many office and information managers do not have access to good internet connectivity whereas others do not have access to internet connection at all. Most of them are not also technologically canny to be able to utilize this virtual environment properly. Lack of electricity has equally affected the productivity level of the office and information manager as electricity is the major requirement to use the virtual environment. Their productivity level has been hampered with as a result of inadequate knowledge of the virtual environment. Most of them were not used to the virtual environment as such, when the need arouses for the use of the virtual environment, they could not perform. This went a long way to affect their productivity in the organization.

Way forward on how the office and information manager can live and be productive in this COVID-19 pandemic era:

From the foregoing, there is the need for the office and information manager to go for training and retraining to still remain relevant and productive in the organization. He/she should strive to attain better heights in their areas of specialty. This means that even when the organization did not send them out to attend seminars/workshops or that they do not have the resources to train them; they should aspire to become better office and information managers by providing for themselves the necessary tools to work in the virtual environment. The condition of their homes should be improved upon since the virtual environment needs constant network and steady light, they should make adequate preparation maybe with the help of their organization to have the needful so as to perform better for the organization. When these things are in place, there will be an improvement in their productivity level.

Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Productivity of the Information Manager

Information manager regulates the flow of information either electronically or procedurally, within and among offices. For many organizations, the rate at which work can be done is limited by the rate at which information can be transmitted to the people who need it, so the information manager fills a critical role. The COVID-19 pandemic hampered productivity in many organizations. The fear of it caused the world to short down including organizations, the result of which has rendered many jobless and sent them back to labour market. It has also changed the style or ways in which office and information managers or employee performs their functions or duties. Most office and information managers either work from home or work in few numbers from their physical office with increased use of virtual work systems. Unlike in the past, there is an increase in the adoption of Whatsapp, zoom, video conferencing platform, office social media, e-mail, etc. Office and information managers are required to clinch to a new way of work to still be relevant in the organizations.

On a general note, office and information managers maintain departmental or organizational records, provide administrative and technical support as well as handle confidential correspondence, reports, agendas, memos, letters, forms, work schedules, and other administrative correspondences. In some climes

(zones), before the Covid-19 Pandemic, information managers constantly made physical contacts with internal and external business stakeholders as they coordinate administrative activities and management records. Some of them routinely carried files and record jackets from one section of the organization to another. With the advent of digital office automation, information management can furthermore be seen as the use of digital resources in the planning, creation, structuring, storage, retrieval, dissemination, and utilization of information resources in an institution. The activities of the office and information officer today also entail cloud computing, virtual meeting, social media usage, etc. and she/he must strive to master them to remain relevant and productive in the organizations. Office and information managers are considered as the foremost business assets that expedite the regular accomplishments and tasks of an institution or an organization they find themselves. The outbreak of COVID-19 exposed the flaws of most information managers. Since most of them did not have avenues to develop themselves (like attending seminars and workshops) or did they even make any effort to develop themselves on the use of these automated machines, this pandemic period that required working from homes via zoom and the likes exposed their weaknesses as such affected their productivity. The office and information manager needs to know more on the advanced areas of virtualization e.g. advanced social media usage, virtual meeting, cloud computing, so as to remain relevant and productive this pandemic period and beyond. For those office and information managers who are having issues of adaptability, there is the need to upgrade and learn in their work to still remain relevant and productive in the organization as the case maybe.

Crisis Management Theory

This work is anchored on Crisis management theory. Crisis management is the process by which an organization deals with a disruptive and unexpected event that threatens to harm the organization or its stakeholders. The study of crisis management originated with large-scale industrial and environmental disasters in the 1980s.

Three elements are common to a crisis: (a) A threat to the organization, (b) The elements of surprise, (c) A short decision time. Venette (2003) argues that "crisis is a process of transformation where the old system can no longer be maintained".

Therefore, the fourth defining quality is the need for change. If change is not needed, the event could more accurately be described as a failure or incident. Crisis management involves dealing with threats before, during and after they have occurred.

Crisis management is a situation based management system that includes clear roles and responsibilities and process related organizational requirements company-wide. The response shall include action in the following areas: Crisis prevention, crisis assessment, crisis handling and crisis termination. The aim of crisis management is to be well prepared for crisis, ensure a rapid and adequate response to the crisis, maintaining clear lines of reporting and communication in the event of crisis and agreeing rules for crisis termination.

Crisis management consists of different aspects including:

- Methods used to respond to both the reality and perception of crisis.
- Establishing metrics to define what scenarios constitute a crisis and should consequently trigger the necessary response mechanism
- Communication that occurs within the response phase of emergency management scenarios.

Crisis management methods of a business or an organization are called a crisis management plan. A crisis mindset requires the ability to think of the worst-cases scenario while simultaneously suggesting numerous solutions. The credibility and reputation of organizations is heavily influenced by the perception of their responses during crisis situations. The organization and communication involved in responding to a crisis in a timely fashion makes for a challenge in businesses. There must be open and consistent communication throughout the hierarchy to contribute to a successful crisis communication process.

Types of crisis

During the crisis management process, it is important to identify types of crisis in that different crises necessitate the use of different crisis management strategies, Coombs, W. T. (1999).

Lerbinger as sited in wikipedia (2020) categorized eight types of crises

1. Natural disaster
2. Technological crisis
3. Confrontation
4. Malevolence
5. Organizational Misdeeds
6. Workplace Violence
7. Rumors
8. Terrorist attacks/man-made disasters

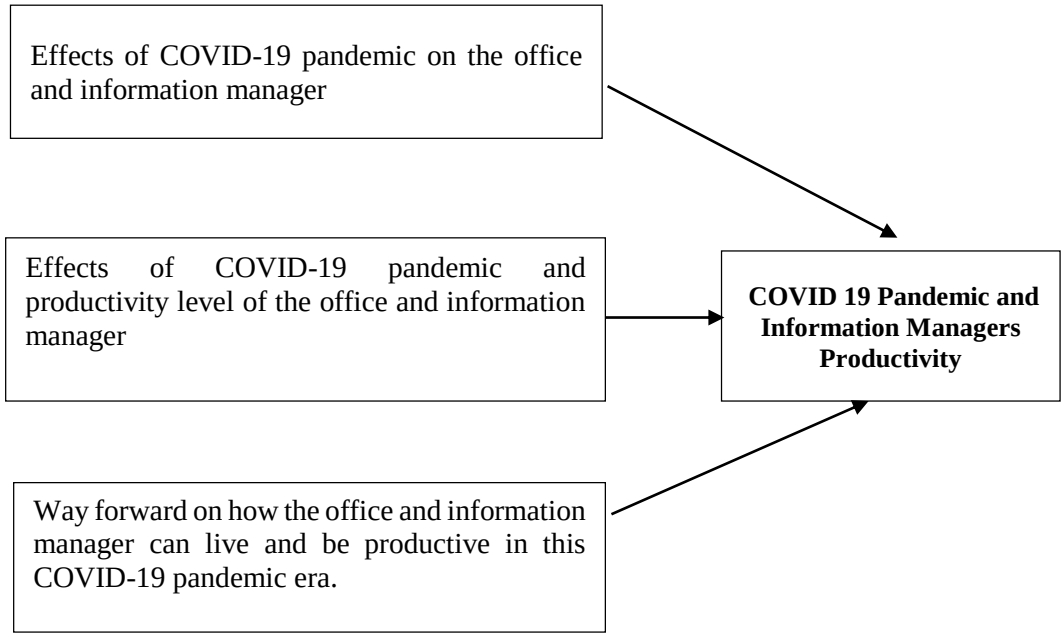
This work anchored on the terrorist attacks/man-made disasters type of crisis. In this case, COVID-19 is not a terrorist attack but man-made disasters. a crisis of pandemic proportions is ravaging the globe. The COVID-19 virus has killed tens of thousands and infected more than a million. In addition to the physical threat of the virus, people's mental and emotional well-being is at risk. COVID-19 is a 'crisis' in every sense of the word. According to Melissa, H. Adamson (2020), Man-made disasters are the result of human intent, error, or as a result of failed systems. They can be divided into categories such as terrorism, technological hazards, transportation hazards and environmental accidents.

Bioterrorism: Bioterrorism is the deliberate release of viruses, bacteria, or other germs (also known as 'agents') used to cause illness or death in people, animals or plants. Bioterrorism is the unlawful release of a biological agent (bacteria, virus or toxins) with the intent to intimidate or coerce a government or civilian population to further political or social objectives. Humans, animals and plants can be sickened or killed by the biological agent used in the attack.

To this extent, Covid-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus, that has not been previously discovered or identified in humans. It was first reported to WHO on the 31st of December, 2019 in Wuhan China, it is a respiratory illness and the primary transmission rout is through person to person contact and through direct contact with respiratory droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The emergence of this Covid-19 pandemic put pressure on individuals, policy makers, supervisory institution on a précised note the entire human race across the globe, which eventually led to a mandatory global

lockdown. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the diseases out break on the 11th March 2020. Covid-19 is not just a health crisis, it constituted serious socio-economic challenges. Various protocols have emerged as efforts intensify to cushion the spread of the pandemic. Thus, the term Covid-19 Pandemic brings to mind terms such as lockdown, physical/social distancing, face masking, regular hand washing/sanitizing, Covid-19 induced inflation, resource downsizing, etc.

This work was anchored on this theory because coronavirus brought about a global crisis that took so many lives. It was also man-made disaster because it was created by a group of scientist in China trying to carry out whatever experiment that resulted to so many loss of lives. The aftermath of this global crisis is still being felt in many areas of our lives, businesses organizations and so on.



Source: Researchers Desk (2021)

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the COVID 19 Pandemic and Information Managers Productivity.

Conclusion

The Pandemic has actually transformed the way people live and work generally. It has also birthed a swift shift in how office and information managers work and carry out their day to day activities. Before now, most office and information managers were stereotyped to carrying and transferring information contents in hardcopies. Today, all that has changed as they need to be automated to be relevant in the organization. Office and Information managers have to cope with a new system of administrative practice where social media platforms such as WhatsApp constitute the new administrative desk in sharing information contents across offices and units of an organization. They have to accept the new reality of virtually working from their homes and learn to use them to still be relevant in the organizations. It is important therefore that office and information managers deliberately build their virtual communication capability in order to remain productive, relevant, effective and functional in the organizations.

Recommendation

1. Covid-19 Pandemic has evidently transformed the way we live and work. In addition to ushering in physical/social distancing, lockdown, and socio-economic contractions, Covid-19 Pandemic has also birthed a swift shift in how office and information managers work.
2. Office and information managers should create avenues to develop themselves (like attending seminars and workshops) and even make greater effort to develop themselves on the use of automated machines this pandemic period.
3. Since this period required working from homes via zoom and the likes, organizations should create avenues to enable the office and information manager become more exposed to the use of these automated machine way of live. With this in place, their weaknesses and inadequacy will be covered and as such productivity will improve.
4. There should be training and retraining of the office and information managers on the use of these new but underway trends (i.e. virtual work practices) so as to improve productivity and remain relevant in organizations.

References

Adamson, M. H. (2020). Terrorism & man-made disasters. Health department McHenry county, Illinois. Retrieved www.mchenycountyil.gov/county-government/departments-a-i/health-departments.

Adamson, M. H. (2020). What is bioterrorism? Bioterrorism & bioterrorism agents. © 2020 McHenry County. Retrieved www.mchenycountyil.gov/county-government/departments- a-i/health-departments.

Bundy, Jonathan; Pfarrer, Michael D.; Short, Cole E.; Coombs, W. Timothy (2017). Crises and crisis management: integration, interpretation and research development. Journal of management. 43 (6).

COOMBS, w. t. (1999). Ongoing crisis communication: planning, managing and responding. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Davis, L. (1997). Principles of information management. Lagos: Pearl Publishers.

Fatma, I. (2020). The effects of Covid-19 pandemic on the workforce in Turkey. *Social mentality and research thinkers journal 6(32): 1125-1134*

Frequently asked questions (2020). The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Plot 801, Ebitu Ukwe street, Jabi, Abuja. info@ncdc.gov.ng

Gewertz, M. H. (2016). Information manager role. Retrieved from Standard business mhtmi.

Based on eBook "Defining enterprise", available at eaBooks.net.

Grant. A. M, Shin. J, 2011, Work motivation: Directing, energizing, and maintaining effort (and research). Forthcoming in R.M. Ryan (Ed.), Oxford Handbook of Motivation. [Accessed 11th Mar 2016].

Incident or crisis? Why the debate?

Kazemi, Y. & Abbas, A. (2016). *Introduction to information management*. Aba: Pearl Publishers.

Kuppuswamy, C.P. & Shankar, V. (2010). An exploration of social networking site use, multitasking, and academic performance among United States and European university students. *Computer in Human Behaviour*, 29(3), 1182-1192.

Martin, W. (2020). What is information management. Retrieved on August 16th, 2020 from https://www.tlu.ee/~sirvir/Information%20and%20Knowledge%20Management/Key_Concepts_of_IKM/information_management.html.

Poole, E. (2009). Organizational spirituality–a literature review. *Journal of business ethics*, *84*(4), 577-588.

Singh, H. (2017). #10 important trends in PR that you can't afford to ignore. Entrepreneur. Retrieved 25 August, 2018.

Tugbe, N. (2021). Evaluation of the effectiveness of office and information manager's work life balance in organization. Innovative journal of social science, arts and management. ISSN:2288-80X1.

United Nations Development Programme (2020). *COVID-19 pandemic: Humanity needs leadership and solidarity to defeat the coronavirus.* Retrieved on August 16th, 2020 from https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/coronavirus.html.

Venette, S. J. (2003). Risk communication in a high reliability organization: retrieved from en.m.wikipedia.org. 11th December, 2020.

www.dictionary.comproductivity definitions. Copyright © 2020 LoveToKnow. All Rights Reserved

What is productivity? A complete guide to being more productive. www.tonyrobbins.com

What is productivity? Definition and meaning-BusinessDictionary.com. www.businessdictionary.com

World Health Organization (2020). *There is a current outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) disease.* Retrieved on August 16th, 2020 from https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1.