



## **OFFICE MANAGEMENT SKILLS REQUIRED OF OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT GRADUATES IN EBONYI STATE CIVIL SERVICE**

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### **Abstract**

*This study was carried out to determine office management skills required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective performance in Ebonyi State Civil Service. Two research questions were raised to guide the study while one null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The entire population of 166 supervisors who supervise Office Technology and Management staff in Ebonyi State civil service were used for the study. Data were collected for the study through the administration of a validated questionnaire on the respondents. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha correlation formula. The overall reliability coefficient obtained was 0.92. Mean statistic was used to answer the research questions while t-test statistic was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that human relations skills and communication skills were highly required of office technology and management graduate for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service. It was concluded that to be professionally relevance and competitive in the face of technological innovations of this era, graduates of office technology and management programme must be exposed to the identified skills to acquaint themselves with the trend of modern office work requirements. It was recommended among others that these office skills should be emphasized at different levels of training of OTM students in order to endow them with relevant skills they are required to have in their work places.*

**Keywords:** Supervisors, Office Technology and Management graduates, Office Management Skills

### **Introduction**

Office Technology and Management (OTM) programme as a new nomenclature for Secretarial Studies came into existence in 2004. The Secretarial profession has become vast and highly demanding than it used to in the past because of the dynamic nature of the world. The use of archaic and slow manual office machines and equipment has given way to highly sophisticated ones. Persistent yearnings from stakeholders (employers of labour and professional bodies) on the need for a change in the nomenclature and course contents of the programme as posited by Omeje (2009) and Maurison and Isifeh-Okpokwu (2008) led the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) to change the nomenclature of Secretarial Studies/Administration to Office Technology and Management and drew a new curriculum and course specifications.

With the advent of automation, the duties of Secretaries or Office Technology and Management graduate workers have been revolutionized especially in the areas of communication, telecommunication, micrographics and reprography. Azih (2013) pointed out that in reprography, stencil duplication has been replaced by computer print-outs and Xeroxing systems. Horizontal suspension and other systems are now replaced by compact disc run on data base computer systems in the area of micrograph and telecommunications. Telephones have gone digital while teleconferencing, internet and networking, email, facsimile and other telecommunication equipment are now used. There is hardly any modern business organization that operates without the use of one form of modern office technology or the other.

In the light of the pervasiveness of modern technologies in offices, office technology and management (OTM) graduates ought to have the skills to use these technologies to perform effectively in the workplace. This is important because OTM graduates are important office workers needed in every type of government or private office to assist their superiors or executives in carrying out their responsibilities.

According to Ejeka (2017), an office manager or a secretary is a member of staff who is



concerned with the preparation, preservation and transmission of different types of office documents as well as conventional secretarial duties of confidential nature at various levels in an organization. This implies that a qualified secretary should possess basic office technology skills, have sufficient knowledge of the operations of all departments within the organization where he/she works.

In view of the above, Office Technology and Management programme was designed to prepare the graduate for office work in public and private sectors of the economy. On graduation, the graduates would occupy positions such as Confidential Secretary, Office Manager, Personal Assistants et cetera, and be expected to perform office functions of administration, record keeping, human relations and information and communication technology.

For OTM workers to be able to perform their duties and make meaningful contributions to the success of the organizational goals, they also need to acquire the relevant office skills. Modern office skills are those capabilities and abilities required for maximum utilization of innovative office technologies. Cornacchione (2012) stressed that office skills provide a sound basis for consistent and objective performance standards about what is needed and expected in an organization in terms of human relations skills and communications skills.

### **Human Relations Skills and Effective Performance in Ebonyi State Civil Service.**

Ohaegbulam (2014) defined human relations skills as those employability skills that enable an individual to acquire and keep a job. Such employability skills focus on personal image, attitudes and habits, behavior, techniques of communication, problem solving, decision making, management and organizational processes. Iheriohanma (2000) stated that individual competence skills are those set of attitudes and personality traits by an individual prior to the individual's engagement into one occupation or the other. The personal skills are needed by graduates in various designated offices for excellent performance. Obedience to superior officers, self-competence and control, punctuality and regularity to work, drive and determination and general knowledge, sense of judgment and initiative, integrity, cooperation with colleagues and good human relations with the public, concentration on the job, keeping of office and business secrets, acceptance of responsibilities, capacity to work under pressure are all indispensable in preparing office technology and management graduates for employment.

### **Communication Skills and Effective Performance in Ebonyi State Civil Service.**

The explosion of paper work and electronic business activities has made the modern business office a communication centre. The trend in management today is towards the information concept of management. The office is characterized as a decision-making centre and good decisions are based on adequate, usable and valid information. Communication is the primary focus of today's office. Communication simply means the exchange, transmission, dissemination, sending and receiving of information from one person to another (Ohaegbulam, 2011). Omeje (2009) stated that communication means the impacting or exchange of ideas, attitudes and information by use of human abilities or technological media; transmission and reception of idea; the broad field of human interchange of thought and opinions; a process of giving and receiving fact, ideas and feelings.

Ekayati (2010) identified the basic communication skills needed by modern office workers for effective job performance to include: spelling, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary, sentence and paragraph structures, sound usage of proof-reading. The Office Technology and Management graduate should be able to think logically, analyze the audience, organize ideas clearly, concisely, tactfully and courteously. These make up writing skills. Office Technology and Management graduates should develop oral communication skills required as office workers. The skills are giving and receiving information and instruction, persuading abilities, setting up and participating in conferences, seminars, workshops, meetings and making short formal presentations. These are speaking skills. The modern office workers should be vast in reading, listening and hearing skills for effective job performance (Ohaegbulam, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Development and innovation in technology have brought about tremendous changes in today's offices and business environments. These innovations demand greater responsibilities and improved performance on the part of OTM graduates in view of their vital role in processing office information. This implies that today's office managers who are unable to cope with the demands of office technology will become irrelevant, low priced or even unemployed as the case may be.

Unfortunately, the training given to OTM students does not seem to reflect the wave of



technological changes. This has created disparity between what is imparted to the OTM students in terms of abilities and the needs of the industries. Azih (2013) observed that the performances of some OTM graduates fall short of acceptable practices in modern office technologies. This suggests that they have not adequately acquired the skills needed for effective use of modern office technologies during their training. Consequently, some functions supposed to be handled by OTM graduates are thus given to graduates of other disciplines. Where OTM workers lack skills to use efficient and effective working tools, productivity is definitely bound to be unimpressive. If these OTM graduates are exposed to a variety of office skills, they might become more effective in their jobs.

It then appears that the institutions producing the OTM graduates are not quite sure of the exact skills needed by the employers of labour. The problem of skill mis-match suggests that the institutions are not satisfying employers in terms of the office skills expected of OTM graduates. This study, therefore, set out to determine the office management skills required of Office Technology and Management graduates of Nigerian Polytechnics for effective performance in Ebonyi State Civil Service.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The major purpose of this study was to determine the office management skills required of Office Technology and Management graduates of Nigerian Polytechnics for effective performance in modern offices. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain the:

1. Human relations skills required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service.
2. Communication skills required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What human relations skills are required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service?
2. What communication skills are required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service?

### **Hypothesis**

Ho: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of supervisors on the office management skills required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service based on designation.

### **Methods**

The study adopted descriptive survey design. Nworgu (2015) posited that it is most preferable to use survey design when the subject of an investigation centers on individual opinions or views, attitudes and perceptions purely on personal basis. The researcher chose this design for the study as the study was aimed at surveying the opinions of supervisors of Office Technology and Management graduates in Ebonyi State civil service on skills needed for effective performance in the civil service. The population of the study comprised of 166 supervisors who work with secretaries in Ebonyi State civil service. The population size was not too large for the study and therefore, there was no sampling. The instrument used to collect data for this study was a 36 item structured questionnaire developed by the researcher with insight gained from literature reviewed. The questionnaire was structured on a 4 – point rating scale as follows:

Very Highly Required	(VHR)	4
Highly Required	(HR)	3
Moderately Required	(MR)	2
Fairly Required	(FR)	1

To determine the validity of the instrument, it was given to three experts in business education from the Department of Business Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The experts were presented with the purpose of the study, research questions and hypothesis. The items were scrutinized in terms of relevance, language coverage of the scope of the study, general text format and suitability. The instrument was corrected to reflect the opinions of the experts.



The reliability of the instrument was established using pilot test involving thirty supervisors from Enugu State civil service. The internal consistency of the instrument was computed using Cronbach Alpha which measured the consistency of all items globally and individually. A general coefficient of 0.92 was obtained. This is considered high enough for the instrument to be reliable. The researcher administered 166 copies of the instrument with the help of two research assistants. All the copies of the questionnaire were retrieved representing 100%. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The t-test statistical tool was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

**Presentation of Data**

**Research Question 1**

What Human Relations Skills are Required of Office Technology and Management graduates for Effective Performance in Ebonyi State Civil Service.

Analysis of data relating to this research question is presented in table 1.

**Table 1:** Mean Ratings of Supervisors on Human Relations Skills Required of Office Technology and Management Graduates for Effective Performance

S/N	Human Relations Skills	$\bar{x}$	SD	Dec.
1	Ability to maintain proper relations with public	3.53	0.71	VHR
2	Ability to maintain proper relations with fellow staff	3.58	0.64	VHR
3	Ability to make referral duties with tact	3.16	0.87	HR
4	Ability to recommend changes in correspondences	3.17	0.82	HR
5	Ability to discuss developmental programmes with colleagues	3.19	0.83	HR
6	Ability to have a cordial relationship with visitors	3.48	0.75	HR
7	Ability to train junior staff	3.31	0.81	HR
8	Ability to handle difficult issues	3.33	0.72	HR
9	Ability to manage difficult boss	3.36	0.75	HR
10	Ability to delegate responsibilities to subordinates	3.17	0.84	HR
11	Ability to know the executive's likes and dislikes	3.31	0.93	HR
12	Ability to accord respect to everybody in the organization	3.46	0.78	HR
Cluster mean		3.34	0.52	HR

Table 1 presents the results on the rating of supervisors' on human relations skills required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective job performance in Ebonyi State civil service. From the result ten out of twelve items received mean ratings ranging from 3.16 – 3.48 within the real limits of 2.50 – 3.50 and were regarded as highly required. The remaining two items (ability to maintain proper relations with the public and ability to maintain proper relations with fellow staff) received mean ratings of 3.53 and 3.58 and were thus regarded as very highly required. The cluster mean for this cluster 3.34 implies that human relations skills are highly required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service. The range of standard deviation (0.64 – 0.93) revealed that the respondents were not far apart in their ratings. This therefore means that human relations skills are highly required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective job performance in Ebonyi State civil service.

**Research Question 2**

What Communication skills are required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service.

Analysis of data relating to this research question is presented in table 2.

**Table 2:** Mean Ratings of Supervisors' on Communication Skills Required of Office Technology and Management graduates for Effective Performance.

S/N	Communication Skills	X	SD	Dec.
13	Ability to compose inter-office memos.	3.48	0.78	HR
14	Ability to interview visitors calling in the office.	3.34	0.84	HR
15	Ability to compose replies to correspondences.	3.46	0.79	HR
16	Ability to screen telephone calls.	3.26	0.96	HR
17	Ability to understand minute preparation.	3.46	0.81	HR
18	Ability to interpret file action page appropriately.	3.28	0.87	HR
19	Ability to write draft reports.	3.48	0.73	HR
20	Ability to channel telephone calls appropriately.	3.23	0.87	HR



21	Ability to edit official documents.	3.21	0.86	HR
22	Ability to transmit printed materials using facsimile machine.	2.87	1.03	HR
23	Ability to send text messages.	3.41	0.85	HR
24	Ability to browse the internet for information.	3.39	0.82	HR
25	Ability to write legibly.	3.42	0.81	HR
26	Ability to be accurate in communication.	3.44	0.75	HR
27	Ability to use the parts of speech correctly.	3.37	0.83	HR
28	Ability to overcome stage-fight during speaking.	3.17	0.90	HR
29	Ability to simple sentence.	3.30	0.84	HR
30	Ability to apply harmony in sentence construction.	3.27	0.79	HR
31	Ability to understand the flow of organizational communication (upward, downward, horizontal and diagonal).	3.20	0.90	HR
32	Ability to avoid clash of interest in communication.	3.07	0.91	HR
33	Ability to think before communicating.	3.34	0.82	HR
34	Ability to obtain feedback to ensure comprehension by the Receiver.	3.16	0.91	HR
35	Ability to choose proper channel of communication.	3.18	0.79	HR
36	Ability to write direct requests .	3.19	0.79	HR
Cluster Mean		3.29	0.61	HR

Table 2 presents the result on supervisors' ratings on the communication skills required of Office Technology and Management graduates in Ebonyi State civil service. The respondents' rated all the items on communication skill as high required with mean scores ranging from 2.87 – 3.48. These mean ratings fell within the real limit of 2.50 – 3.49 and were regarded as highly required. The cluster mean of this cluster (3.29) fell within the same real limit numbers and is thus regarded as highly required. The standard deviation ranges from 0.73– 1.03 which indicates homogeneity of responses. Therefore it was adjudged that communication technology skills are highly required of Office Technology and Management students for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service.

### Test of Hypothesis

Table 3: Independent t-test Analysis of Male and Female supervisors' mean ratings of office skills required of Office Technology and Management Graduates for Effective Performance

Variable	Gender				t-cal	t-critical	
	Male		Female				
	χ	SD	χ	SD			
Dec.	(N=98)		(N=68)				
Human Relations skills	3.69	0.45	3.29	0.61			
Communication skills	3.34	0.48	3.22	0.76	0.885	1.96	NS

- Not significant at  $P \geq 0.05$

Table 3, shows t-test of responses of male and female supervisors' on the adequacy of OTM graduates' job performance in Ebonyi State civil service with mean scores of 3.69 and 3.29 for human relations and mean score of 3.34 and 3.22 for communication skills respectively. These values were tested for significance by comparing the calculated t-value with the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 level with 164 degree of freedom. The obtained t-values were less than the critical value (1.96). Hence, the results were not significant and the null hypothesis was accepted. The result therefore means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female supervisors on the office management skills required of Office Technology and Management graduates for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service.

### Discussion of findings

Analysis of data in Table 1 showed that human relations skills are highly required of office technology and management graduates' for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service. In the opinion of supervisors', ability to maintain proper relations with the public and with fellow staff were rated as very highly required for effective performance of office technology and management graduates' in the civil service.



These findings agreed with the findings of Evetts (2011) to the effect that human relations skills are required for productivity in offices. Evetts added that such skills should be produced by education, training and apprenticeship, socialization and sometimes guaranteed by licensing.

The present finding suggests that despite the realities of the digital divide, supervisors' have seen and anticipate the several benefits which several human relations skills could bring to their organizations. They expect the OTM graduates they could employ in future to be able to possess several human relations skills to be able to project a good corporate image.

The analysis of data to the second research question revealed that communication skills are highly required of office technology and management graduates for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service. Specifically, supervisors' in Ebonyi State civil service considered all items on communication skills highly required of office technology and management graduates' for effective performance.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that OTM graduates require human relations and communication skills for effective performance in Ebonyi State civil service. In essence, today's OTM graduates are required to be highly versatile and competent in office functions. Therefore, to be professionally relevant and competitive in the face of the technological innovations of the era, graduates of office technology and management programme must be exposed to the identified skills to acquaint themselves with the trend of modern office technologies.

## **Recommendations**

In the light of the findings of the study the following recommendations are made:

- 1 Human relations and communication skills should be emphasized at different levels of training both at the pre-service and in service training of OTM graduate workers in order to endow them with relevant skills they are expected to have in their workplaces.
- 2 The OTM graduates should be made to imbibe the habit of reading journals, attending to workshops and seminars to improve on their skills so as to be effective and efficient in the operations of modern offices.
- 3 Curriculum planners should ensure that the content of the OTM programme should reflect the critical skills required in modern offices. This will ensure that OTM undergraduates learn and imbibe these skills while still in school. Similarly, the teaching of relevant soft skills will further strengthen the OTM undergraduate.
- 4 The tertiary institutions should make efforts to equip the OTM departments with modern information communication technologies to help equip the undergraduates with requisite skills in information technology needed in offices of today and tomorrow.

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