

Precautionary Skills Required by Office Managers in Managing Technological Job Hazards in the Automated Office

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study is to identify the precautionary measures and precautionary skills required by office managers to managing technological job hazards in the automated office. The study applied survey design because it sought the opinion/view of middle level administrators and secretaries in three (3) institutions of higher learning in Ebonyi State. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample size of 133 office personnel, of the 133 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 96% were returned. The instruments for the study were tagged "Precautionary Skills for Managing Occupational hazards by Office Managers Questionnaire" (PSFMOHBOMQ). The instrument was validated by experts from the Department Of Business Administration, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha after it was administered on 20 respondents who were part of the study population but not part of the sample. This gave a coefficients of 0.82. The Mean and standard deviation was used to answer research questions. The result of analysis revealed that office workers are exposed to radiation and heat from technological equipment in the office, data loss/theft, electrical hazards and some of its potential effects are Musculoskeletal disorders and stress as well as mental disorders, particularly in elongated exposures. It is recommended that Use a hazard control plan to guide the selection and implementation of controls, and implement controls according to the plan.

Keywords: Workplace hazards, Precautionary skills, Office automation, Office Manager, Occupational health and safety

Introduction

The office is a place of function. From basic information management and administrative duties to complex business activities, the office serves as a platform for operation. An Office is a unit where relevant records for the purpose of control, planning and efficient management of the organization are prepared, handled and preserved. It provides facilities for internal and external communication and coordinates activities of different departments of the organization. According to Lynch (2007), the core activities in an office includes collecting information; processing information; storing information; coordinating information and distributing information. Thus, an office may be defined as a place where all

the activities concerned with collecting, processing, storing and distributing information for efficient and effective management of an organization are carried out.

Every modern organization is required to have an office. Whether it is a government department, business firm, school, hospital, or a voluntary organization, the existence of an office is a must to enable necessary clerical and administrative tasks to be performed properly. Thus, office is a service department of an organization which is connected with the handling of records and provision of various services like typing, duplicating, mailing, filing, handling of office machines, keeping records, drafting, using information, handling money and other miscellaneous activities.

For decades now, fast changes have been taking place in all facets of human life including the office environment. All changes according to Igbinoba (2000) in the office environment were and still are driven by advances in technology. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are increasingly viewed as a vital infrastructure for the new office. Office automation and technology allow office functions like typing, filing, storing, and retrieving to be automated. It can be said that the contemporary business circle is computerized. Technological gadgets such as computers, printers, photocopiers, projectors, scanners and some infrared devices used for barcoding and tracking of documents have been introduced into the office. These technologies have greatly improved the productivity of offices. These devices in and of themselves have revolutionized the office. However, they pose a new challenge. The challenge with some of the new technologies in the office comes with the hazards inherent in them. Some of these devices were built with radioactive materials that could be harmful to individuals if exposed for prolonged time. Others produce rays that are hazardous to the eyes, while some increase the likelihood of electric shock. Some of these devices produce noise sometimes that could be harmful to the body and some even produce electronic hazards such as viruses that may destroy documents stored in them. There is also the challenge of disposing some of these gadgets after use. All these are occupational hazards that must be managed. A hazard is something that can cause harm if not controlled. When hazardous, a situation constitutes threat to life, property or environment. The outcome of an uncontrolled hazard is an accident (Caleb & Usoro, 2016).

Changes have occurred in the modern workplace as a result of the new office technology and automation of office equipment. According to Eric (2013), as with all new technology, these changes bring with it a set of health and safety concerns. In addition to obvious hazards such as slippery floors or an open file drawer, a modern office may also contain hazards that can include: poor lighting, noise, poorly designed furniture, and equipment or machines that emit gases and vapours when not properly maintained. Even the nature of office work itself has produced numerous stress-related symptoms and musculoskeletal strains. For example, long hours at a poorly designed computer workstation can cause pains in the neck and back, shoulders, lower extremities, arms, wrists, hands, eyestrain, and a general feeling of tension and irritability. The leading types of disabling accidents that occur within the office are falls, strains and over exertions, falling objects, striking against objects, and being caught in or between objects. Safety is important everywhere, especially in the workplace. Although the typical office does not seem, to many people, to include heavy-duty or dangerous equipment, the environment appears to have no such obvious hazards. The somewhat played down hazards at the office can still be disastrous if precautionary measures are not put in place to avert occurrence, either by the individual or organization (Armstrong, 2000).

Precaution is the act of taking measures ahead of time in order to prevent something dangerous, unpleasant or difficult from happening. These constitute risk, hindrance or inconvenience to the individuals concerned. According to Wikipedia (2010), the precautionary principle or approach demands that action(s) or policy (ies) suspected of causing risk to the public or the environment, in the absence of specific consensus that the action or policy is harmful, should have the burden of proof failing on those taking the action. This implies some form of social responsibility to protect the public from exposure to harm when scientific investigation has found a plausible risk. The need for control measures increases with both the level of possible harm and the degree of uncertainty.

Statement of the Problem

The office of new century is adorned with sophisticated automated and computerized softwares and hardwares that have made work and information processing much easier, faster, reliable and fluid. However, such improvements have come at a cost. Some of these machines and pieces of equipment were designed with toxic elements that pose occupational hazards. Occupational health and safety is a cross-disciplinary area concerned with protecting the safety, health and welfare of people engaged in work or employment. The goal of all occupational health and safety programs is to foster a safe work environment.^[1] As a secondary effect, it may also protect co-workers, family members, employers, customers, suppliers, nearby communities, and other members of the public who are impacted by the workplace environment. Accident prevention and occupational hazard management begins with precautionary measures. Failure to provide guidelines for office application utilization by manufacturers and employees as well as the failure of employees and office users to practice precautionary measures might lead to accident occurrence, which may be fatal, or maim employees or result in permanent health challenges.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to identify the precautionary measures and precautionary skills required by office managers to managing technological job hazards in the automated office under the following specific items:

1. Identify Job hazards encountered by office managers that require precautionary skills.
2. Identify the effects of workplace hazards on office managers.
3. Ascertain the precautionary skills required by office managers in managing hazards.

Research Questions

1. What are the Job hazards encountered by office managers that require precautionary skills?
2. What are the effects of workplace hazards on office managers?
3. What are the precautionary skills required by office managers in managing hazards?

Methodology

The study applied survey design because it sought the opinion/view of middle level administrators and secretaries in three (3) institutions of higher learning in Ebonyi State. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample size of 133 office personnel, of the 133 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 96% were returned. The instruments for the study

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Presentation of Findings

Research Question 1: What are the technological job hazards encountered by office managers that require precautionary skills?

Table 1: Job hazards Encountered by Office Managers

S/N	Job hazard description	n	\bar{x}	SD	Remarks
1	poor or inadequate lighting	127	3.33	0.93	SA
2	electrical hazards (e.g. appliances, power sockets, etc.);	127	3.21	0.88	SA
3	Poor computer work station	127	3.04	1.00	SA
4	Radiation from technological appliances	127	3.63	0.90	SA
5	Duration, intensity and design of office work	127	3.60	0.77	SA
6	Fires from faulty technological appliances	127	3.33	0.91	SA
7	Heat from technological equipment use	127	3.58	0.86	SA
8	Air quality	127	3.45	0.98	SA
9	Computer viruses	127	3.31	0.89	SA
10	Internet data theft	127	3.31	0.77	SA
11	Mobile technology hazards	127	3.28	0.92	SA
12	Social network distractions	127	3.17	0.89	SA
13	Chemical hazards	127	3.12	1.00	SA

*SA=Strongly Agree

Table 1 gives a summary of the technological job hazards in offices. The result shows that the most common technological hazards are radiation from technological appliances, Duration, intensity and design of office work, Heat from technological equipment use and air quality. Other common hazards are computer virus, internet data theft, mobile technology and social network distractions and chemical hazards.

Research Question 2: What are the effects of workplace hazards on office managers?

Table 2: Effects of Job hazards Encountered by Office Managers

S/N	Effects of hazard description	n	\bar{x}	SD	Remarks
1	Falls	127	3.49	0.80	SA
2	Strains and Overexertion	127	3.38	0.84	SA
3	Radiation exposure	127	3.37	0.97	SA
4	Musculoskeletal disorders	127	3.33	0.89	SA
5	Stress	127	3.87	0.34	SA
6	Visual fatigue	127	3.45	0.84	SA

7	Eye strain as a result of computer screen	127	3.63	0.54	SA
8	Breathing problems	127	3.26	1.03	SA
9	Loss of data	127	3.45	0.62	SA
10	Theft	127	3.27	0.95	SA
11	Mental health as a result of continued exposure	127	3.59	0.74	SA
12	Back pains	127	3.72	0.51	SA
13	Disfigured posture	127	3.09	1.12	SA

*SA=Strongly Agree

Table 2 gives the summary of effects of office hazards on office managers. The result identifies the following as common effects of hazards; Strains and Overexertion, Musculoskeletal disorders, Eye strain as a result of computer screen, Visual fatigue, Mental health as a result of continued exposure, Loss of data and theft.

Research Question 3: What are the precautionary skills required by office managers in managing hazards?

Table 2: Precautionary Skills Required by Office Managers in Managing Hazards

S/N	Precautionary Safety Skills	n	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Be aware of your surroundings	127	3.27	0.95	SA
2	Keep correct posture to protect your back	127	3.72	0.51	SA
3	Use screen guards on your computer screen if computer is to be used for extended periods of time	127	3.09	1.12	SA
4	Take Regular Breaks	127	3.05	1.03	SA
5	Use Tools And Machines Properly	127	3.87	0.34	SA
6	Keep Emergency Exits Easily Accessible	127	3.70	0.52	SA
7	Report unsafe conditions to your supervisor	127	3.15	0.98	SA
8	Use mechanical aids whenever possible	127	3.68	0.54	SA
9	Reduce workplace stress	127	3.33	0.75	SA
10	All offices should have health and safety policies	127	3.00	0.95	SA
11	Deal with any hazards promptly.	127	3.12	0.51	SA
12	Equipment should be switched off when not in use for long periods	127	3.34	1.12	SA
13	Broken or worn flooring /light failures should be reported immediately	127	3.05	1.03	SA
14	No equipment should be used if the mains cable, plug or socket is damaged.	127	3.26	0.34	SA

*SA=Strongly Agree

Table 3 lists the precautionary measures for managing technological hazards at the office. The result shows that all the items have mean response above 3.0, hence, they have a positive impact on safety. The items are officer workers should be aware of their surroundings, Keep

correct posture to protect the back, All offices should have health and safety policies, Equipment should be switched off when not in use for long periods or outside normal working hours, Broken or worn flooring /light failures should be reported immediately and no equipment should be used if the mains cable, plug or socket is damaged.

Discussion of Findings

The result of analysis shows that technological hazards are inherent in the office. Among the most common hazards are radiation and Poor computer work station as well as electrical hazards. The challenge of having to loss data to computer virus is still a threat to the virtual office. This finding is in line with Josh (2010) which identified workplace health and safety hazards as including Heat from technological equipment use, Radiation exposure, Duration, intensity and design of office work, Computer viruses and air quality.

Furthermore, the result also identified the effects of the hazards office workers are exposed to. These include stress, Back pains, Musculoskeletal disorders, radiation exposures, mental disorders and Loss of data. This findings is supported by Roy(2014) which found that the prevalence of poor indoor air quality as a result of heat and smells from technological appliances has contributed to a rise in occupational asthma and other respiratory disorders, chemical sensitivity and allergies.

The analysis of results also identified the precautionary measures to be taken to guard against technological health hazards. The study identified the following measures as essential for hazard management. This includes awareness of one's surrounding and correct posture to protect your back. Use mechanical aids whenever possible and reporting of unsafe behaviour. This findings is in line with OSHA(2009) report which averred that effective controls protect workers from workplace hazards; help avoid injuries, illnesses, and incidents; minimize or eliminate safety and health risks; and help employers provide workers with safe and healthful working conditions. Also, Roy (2014) also stated that cleanliness and orderliness, too, may prevent the spread of illnesses and diseases in the workplace. Restrooms, break rooms, lunch areas and refrigerators should be regularly sanitized, and workers should be told to throw out food before it spoils.

Conclusion

This study explored the technological hazards inherent in offices as a result of new automation and technological gadgets utilized in the offices, their potential effects on office workers and the precautionary measures to guard against exposure. The study concludes that these hazards are inherent in the offices and can only be managed. From the findings of the study, it became obvious that the importance of precautionary skills in the training of office managers cannot be overemphasized. The level of health hazards attributable to the use of machines, environment and relationships in the office setting is so enormous that the skills are inevitable if the officer is to survive till retirement age in the work setting. Both administrators and secretaries rated all the tested skills as important.

Recommendations

To effectively control and prevent hazards, employers should:

1. Involve workers, who often have the best understanding of the conditions that create hazards and insights into how they can be controlled.
2. Identify and evaluate options for controlling hazards, using a "hierarchy of controls."

3. Use a hazard control plan to guide the selection and implementation of controls, and implement controls according to the plan.
4. Develop plans with measures to protect workers during emergencies and non-routine activities.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing controls to determine whether they continue to provide protection, or whether different controls may be more effective. Review new technologies for their potential to be more protective, more reliable, or less costly.

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