DIGITALISATION OF WORK PROCESSES IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM UNDER THE NEW NORMAL

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Abstract:
The global spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) has left a world with changing work situations in its trail. What started as some innovative electronic processes (e-processes) to enhance workflow and ensure effective service delivery in the Nigerian University System (NUS) gained momentum during the COVID-19 period and has opened new and bright opportunities for e-processes in the aftermath of COVID-19. However, inspite of the numerous advantages of a progressive digitalisation of work processes in the NUS, the perceived challenge has been that of mixed reactions from the workforce. While a few of the workforce appear to be equipped and favourably disposed to the new normal, a larger proportion seem unprepared and somewhat apathetic to the present demands for a 21st Century efficient and effective service delivery methods in the NUS. The objective of the paper is to appraise the introduction, benefits and challenges of e-processes in the NUS especially

in post COVID-19 era. It relied on primary (participant observation) and secondary (documents) sources of data and was guided by the Innovation Diffusion Theory. The paper explored critical issues of e-processes and result-oriented management under the new normal in the NUS and made appropriate recommendations for both management and staff. In view of its flexibility and benefits, the paper concludes that, so far, digitalisation of work processes in the NUS has expanded the speed and efficiency of processing documents, thereby, enhancing the welfare of stakeholders.

Keywords: *Digitalisation, electronic processes, remote work, virtual meetings, work processes, new normal*

JEL Classification: *O3; I2*

1. Introduction

The issue of digitalisation of work processes with regard to the Nigerian University System (NUS) under the New Normal is in the context of a post coronavirus (COVID-19) era, as this has brought about a new mode of work. Globally, the emergence of COVID-19 in 2019 onward led to severe restrictions on person to person interactions and in some cases, person to animal contacts which necessitated countries to implement several shut downs, lock downs and social distancing policies in order to curb the rapid spread of the deadly virus. While the international community grappled for solutions to contain the menace, technology was employed to interface between humans which facilitated virtual real time interactions as a way forward. Even though there is now a vaccine for the virus, the introduction and expanded use of technology to enhance work processes by way of virtual interactions has led to changing work situations worldwide in post COVID-19.

In Nigeria, before COVID-19, what started as some innovative electronic processes (e-processes) in order to enhance workflow and ensure speedy service delivery in the NUS, gained momentum during the COVID-19 period and has thrown open new and bright vista of opportunities to further digitalise work processes for efficient and effective work output and outcome in the aftermath of COVID-19. However, inspite of the numerous advantages of a progressive digitalisation of work processes in the NUS, the perceived challenge has been that of mixed reactions from the workforce. It was anticipated that as institutions of higher learning and research, Nigerian universities will embrace the new mode of

work or changing work situations overwhelmingly but the practical reality on ground suggests otherwise. In the meantime, while a few of the workforce appear to be equipped and favourably disposed to the new normal, a larger proportion seem unprepared and somewhat apathetic to the present realities and demands for a 21st Century efficient and effective service delivery methods in the NUS. It is in light of this that this paper seeks to explore the digitalisation of work processes in the NUS under the new normal.

2. Objective

The objective of this paper is to appraise the introduction and benefits of electronic processes (e-processes) in the NUS and the challenges emerging from digitalisation of work processes in post COVID-19 era, with a view to charting the way forward under the new normal.

3. Methodology

The paper is essentially qualitative in its outlook with historical and descriptive analysis. It relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. Participant observation is the primary source of data. Simply, observation is the act of watching something happen. Observation is one of the major characteristics of the scientific method. Through observation, the historical trends and dynamics, that is, the 'why' and 'how' of things happening can be gained firsthand; it can lead to accurate descriptions and explanations of such happenings; it can be used to complement related studies; and it can be used to explore new and emerging phenomena (Obasi, 1999). Consequently, the author's direct involvement as a staff in the administrative cadre during the introduction and expansion of e-processes in a Nigerian public university both as an administrative officer and as a principal officer, spanning over three decades, immensely contributed to the insight, descriptions and analysis of this work. The scope of this participant observation by the author covered pre-COVID-19 period; work during COVID-19 era; and post COVID-19 work processes and challenges.

On the other hand, secondary sources of data for the paper include documents and internet resources. Documents here comprise all literature such as journal and newspaper articles, books, official reports and bulletins as well as other written materials which were produced for some other purposes than for the benefit of the author. Accordingly, the data gathered from both primary and secondary sources were synchronised and analysed systematically in line with the objective of this paper.

4. Clarification of concepts

Brief operational definitions of some concepts employed in this work may be helpful at this point, although, they are explained in some detail in related sections of the paper. Key concepts to be clarified here include Digitalisation/Electronic Processes (E-Processes), Work Processes, the Nigerian University System, and the New Normal. Other related technical concepts used are defined or clarified where they are mentioned in the paper.

4.1 Digitalisation/electronic processes (E-Processes)

In this context, digitalisation or electronic processes (e-processes) refers to the introduction and continuous, increasing use of technological means and devices to aid and speed up work and service delivery where before, manual instruments and channels have been employed as the basic practice or mode of work. Here, the continuous and progressive use of technological means and devices do not replace human intelligence but only serve as new innovative methods to aid workforce to perform better, efficiently and effectively. The expected end results are standardised, transparent and objective work practices; increased output and outcome; better and speedy service delivery; less organisational stress; and value-added workforce.

4.2 Work processes

Simply, this refers to the institutional and hierarchical arrangement of personnel, work schedules and performance appraisal methods in an organisation. The essence of work processes entail who coordinates the workforce, how duties are performed and who is responsible for what and when? These processes can be undertaken through physical tools and activities otherwise known as analogue processes or through substantial reliance on technological gadgets and means commonly called digital or electronic processes.

4.3 The Nigerian University System (NUS)

The Nigerian University System is made up of all federal government universities, state government owned universities, privately-owned universities and the management systems that keep them functioning including staff and students, inter-university centres, all degree awarding institutions and the statutory regulatory agency which is the National Universities Commission (NUC) (Mafiana, 2019).

4.4 The New Normal

The New Normal in the Nigerian University System (NUS) refers to the substantial reliance on technological gadgets and means in the work processes

which predominated the mode of work during the COVID-19 period and which seems to have persisted because of its health risks reduction and speedy service delivery benefits.

5. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework employed in this paper is the Innovation Diffusion Theory by Rogers (2003). The Innovation Diffusion Theory postulates that new knowledge and innovation are not uniformly adopted by all stakeholders, there are the few that may quickly adapt to the new innovation, there are a large population who may join later and there are the laggards who will find it difficult to adapt to the new ethos. This is precisely what is playing out in the introduction of e-processes or digitalisation of work processes in the NUS under the new normal. So far, there is a large segment of the workforce that are yet to adapt to the new technology which has come to stay. It is this group that must be encouraged to update their tools to cope with the new normal.

Fundamentally, this theory helps us to understand the learning abilities and dispositions of different individuals when new approaches are introduced in an organisation and the challenges that this posits for the emerging trend. The theory highlights that every individual can learn, but, just not on the same day, or in the same way. With this insight, it will then become easier to proffer result-oriented, practical solutions to integrate and streamline the new methods into the system proactively.

Accordingly, this theory has guided the design of this paper in terms of articulating the challenges at hand, the objective, descriptions and analysis as well as recommendations made. In the final analysis therefore, the strength of the conclusion of this paper is derived from insights gained from this theory and actual observation and verification of the trend of things.

6. The Nigerian University System (NUS) in the New Normal

Education is defined in various ways. Fafunwa (1974) defined education as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour positive to the society in which he or she lives. Education may also be defined as the whole processes of continuous socialisation throughout life (Okoh, 2000; Enaowho, 2000; El Rufai, 2006). In line with these definitions, education is divided into non-formal, informal and formal or structured education, which is also referred to as school system or modern education.

Modern education in Nigeria dates back to 1842 when missionaries arrived at Badagry and set up a school named Nursery of the Infant Church (Fafunwa, 1974; Otto, 2005). Due to the benefits of education, government intervened in 1873 by introducing grants to these private providers of education. Modern education is structured into primary, secondary and tertiary. The university system is a key segment of tertiary education. In Nigeria, the first university college is the University College, Ibadan, which was established in 1948. In 1960, University of Nigeria, Nsukka was established as the first full fledged university in Nigeria. By 1962, there were five universities largely owned by regional governments. These were: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (owned by Eastern Region); University of Ife, Ile-Ife (owned by Western Region); Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (owned by Northern Region); while University of Lagos and University of Ibadan were owned by the Federal Government. In 1975, these universities were taken over by the Federal Military Government as it controlled university education exclusively. However, beginning from 1980, State Governments were allowed to establish universities and by year 2000, privately run universities became permissible. The NUS has grown phenomenally. University education now is on the concurrent list. As at January 2023, there were 221 universities in Nigeria, 111 were privately owned, 50 were owned by the Federal Government, and 60 belonged to State Governments (Rasheed, 2023). These institutions and the management systems that keep them functioning including staff and students, inter-university centres, all degree awarding institutions and the National Universities Commission (NUC) constitute the Nigerian University System (Mafiana, 2019).

The mode of service delivery in the NUS was mainly analogue or the traditional method of face-to-face interactions and meetings in offices or other designated points. This is inspite of paucity of funds especially for public universities where fund allocations have been dwindling in real terms. Consequently, inefficiencies, delays in service delivery, and drudgery among others characterised the system. With the introduction of global system for mobile communications (GSM) in 2001, universities began to explore their use for improved service delivery, gradually abandoning the analogue method. COVID-19 pandemic gave further impetus which ushered in a pervasive use of electronic processes in the management of the day-to-day administrative activities in the Nigerian University System, which has continued post COVID-19, generally impacting on speed of service delivery, cost and value of output.

The point is, the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic has thrown up a new mode of conducting operations, which is an alternate of the pre-existing operational ethos. So, whereas before COVID-19, meetings, conferences, classes, and examinations, respectively, must be conducted together in one place with everybody physically present, post COVID-19, technology can be relied upon to achieve the same objective with people far apart. The NUS is under a new ethos. This is imperative for the NUS which is an intellectual community widely recognised as an advanced community responsible for transmission of high quality knowledge, attitudes, and skills for the sustenance of the individual, the nation and the world at large (Gurin, 2014).

Clearly, what has come to be known as the New Normal therefore, is the reality of work ethos in and post COVID-19 era. The emergence and spread of the *China virus* with its high level of contagion created a need for people to limit person to person contact and to some extent human to animal contact in order not to be infected by the deadly virus across the world. The pandemic had no respect for age, status or geography. So, universities and different strata of education were inclusive. The isolation as was observed, was not momentary. The COVID-19 pandemic began in 2019 and pervasively continued its spread till mid 2021 when its vaccines became available to many parts of the world. Even at that, as at 12th December, 2022, the spread of the coronavirus was still on-going in many countries (https://covid19.who.int retrieved on 12/12/2022). While the COVID-19 pandemic discouraged person to person interaction, survival and human sustenance cannot go on efficiently without human interaction. It is in resolving this challenge that technology has been brought in to forge human interaction with minimal or no person to person contact. Thus, even with no person to person contact production of goods and services continue to flow with no fear of any adverse effect of the contagious disease. Depending on the sector and nature of work, services can be provided from very remote places to people in far away environments with minimal or no physical contact at all. Exchange of ideas, opinions and perspectives can go on.

In the university system, the New Normal has come to mean continued or expanded use of online and technology to provide services that enhance administration, teaching and learning including staff and students' matters, such as meetings, examinations, conferences, promotion assessment, and many others. This is a new phenomenon that was extensively encouraged in the university system as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and has now come to be seen as normal. This, therefore, is the New Normal.

7. Remote work as an emerging work ethos in the Nigerian University System

Remote work may be defined as the practice of employees carrying out their official jobs, duties and assignments from locations other than the centrally operated office of the employer for such activities. These locations could include employee's home, a coworking or other shared spaces, a private office or any other place outside of the traditional corporate office building or campus (https://www.vmware.com>content retrieved on 20/10/2022). Remote work could also mean flexible working arrangements where employees can work from their homes, coworking spaces, coffee shops or other places that are not owned by the firm (https://velocityglobal.com>blog retrieved on 16/11/2022).

It is a type of flexible working arrangement that allows an employee to work from remote locations outside of corporate offices. Remote work is also referred to as working from home (WFH) or telecommuting (https://www.gartner.com> retrieved on 20/10/2022).

In point, remote work or working from home (WFH) or telecommuting refers to flexible work arrangements where a staff, in our context, a university professional administrative staff is allowed or encouraged to attend to his or her official assignments from any convenient locations other than his or her assigned office location, often aided by electronic or telecommunication facilities. Such convenient locations could be his or her home, transport terminals, hotel rooms, among other places, and at periods which may be outside of strictly official hours. Remote work encourages work beyond official time which may enhance greater outcomes due to the expanded time available for work beyond the regular office hours. Increasingly, across the globe, the advantages of WFH are being realised and different agencies are exploring these benefits to provide services to their clients and other stakeholders.

8. Technology, virtual meetings and workflow under the New Normal

Virtual meeting by definition is a form of communication that enables people in different physical locations to use their mobile or internet connected devices to meet in the same virtual room (https://www.webex.com> retrieved on 20/10/2022). It is the use of telecommunication to facilitate human interaction and communication among people in different locations in a virtual room or a meeting point bringing different people, opinions and perspectives to arrive at decisions in real time, though physically located at different places (Ukpere, 2022).

A virtual meeting may also be described as a meeting where people from different locations interact through the use of phone text, video and audio

telecommunication facilities. A virtual meeting is unlike the usual face-to-face or contact meeting. It is a web activity or a web conference using internet applications. It is an online meeting, where at least two people engage themselves in an exchange of ideas, information or perspective. The essence of virtual meetings is to create a forum for exchange of ideas using electronic processes, especially when face-to-face meetings are unrealistic or ill-advised as it was in the heat of COVID-19 pandemic.

Virtual meetings can also take the form of hybrid, in which some of the attendees are physically present at the designated venue of the meeting while some others attend from different locations elsewhere. Remote work and virtual meetings, therefore, may simply be said to mean a new mode of service delivery where the use of electronic-processes (e-processes) are leveraged upon to provide efficient and timely services in spite of the constraints of space and time.

9. The pros and cons of electronic processes (e-processes)
9.1 The pros of electronic processes

As stated above, both remote work and virtual meetings centre on the use of e-processes in facilitating service delivery, which in our context is the Nigerian University System. Interestingly, COVID-19 did not initiate the New Normal, it only catalysed it. Many universities in Nigeria and elsewhere have already adopted e-processes, such as e-Senate (paperless Senate), e-Examinations, e-Transcript processing, and so on, prior to the emergence of COVID-19 (Otto, 2008; Otto, Otto & Ukpere, 2020). According to Ogunmodede et al. (2022), the search for and use of media spaces that can provide real time audio and visual communication between individuals in different physical locations dates back to the 1980s.

E-processes have many advantages over the traditional (analogue) mode of service delivery (Isbasoiu, & Ukpere, 2011). These advantages include economy, efficiency, speed and objectivity, among others. For instance, with e-Senate Meetings, the huge sums of money spent to purchase paper and other accessories could be saved. In addition, there are other logistic costs that can be minimised, including cost of the movement of hardcopy folders to members at their various locations. Above all, the stress associated with the compilation and management of the entire process on the schedule officers is significantly alleviated. These advantages also exist in many other e-processes including Computer Based Tests (CBT) (Aguolu, et al., 2019). Again, members who are unable to physically attend the meeting can make their contributions from wherever they are, which may

enrich decisions of Senate or any other virtual meeting in the university. This could lead to efficiency. E- processes are generally faster, for example, the results of computer-based examinations can be known as soon as the candidate clicks the 'Submit' button (Isbasoiu & Ukpere, 2011; Gurgu, et al., 2019). Meeting folders can be distributed to and received by all members of any committee, including Senate via email, by a single click on the 'Send' button on the computer, smart phone or any other electronic device. E-meetings reduce the huge pile of papers required for the traditional mode of meetings, thus optimising office space required for work. As automated processes, e-processes are very objective as the machines have no opinions, emotions or subjective judgments which could tilt results or outcomes to favour cronies. In virtual conferences, chat boxes provide opportunities for virtual attendees, to raise questions and comments without fear of intimidation by senior colleagues (Ogunmodede et al., 2022).

E-processes have come to stay post COVID-19. With e-processes, typical of the New Normal, distance is no longer a major challenge in the Nigerian University System, as staff can connect to virtual meetings across the world from any location they are. They can as well provide their services from their homes and any location to relevant stakeholders, in so far there is web coverage in these locations. Work can be done throughout the day and at weekends (24/7), thus enhancing deliverables to stakeholders.

Though not all activities are amenable to WFH, many administrative functions in the university, at least, as they are currently in the Nigerian University System can conveniently be done remotely. These include student registration processes, e-filing and records maintenance, meetings, counselling, training, information dissemination, among others. The benefits of virtual meetings and WFH are obvious, the issues are more about stakeholder perceptions and the availability of required tools to drive the process.

9.2 The cons of electronic processes

E-processes also have their limitations. For instance, erratic power supply in Nigeria is a major challenge for the smooth running of e-processes. The technology (including the associated hardware and software) is largely foreign and its intensive use can impact on scarce foreign exchange. This is more so, given the paucity of funds in the universities. There is also the need for continuous availability of internet connectivity.

10. Requirements for digitalisation of work processes and workflow

For any organisation to effectively utilise these virtual processes, there are minimum requirements. These include: (a) laptops, tablets or smart phones; (b) internet connectivity with video and audio capabilities; (c) workforce with ability to use these facilities and technical skills required to troubleshoot and to repair or maintain the computer hardware as the need arises.

11. **Virtual meeting platforms**

There are several virtual meeting platforms. These include, Skpe, Zoom, Bluejeans, Webex, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams (MS Teams), Google Drive, Slack, Front, Dropbox, among many others. In fact, there are over thirty virtual meeting hosting platforms currently as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: A map of Nigeria as a virtual workplace showing various globally available virtual meeting platforms
Source: Author's design

The information and telecommunication experts of the respective universities can guide the university or the department on which platform to use based on the particular need of the services to be rendered, among other variables.

Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, and others, are used to achieve interactions mostly among family members, friends and colleagues, and in some cases employed for information dissemination, remote work and virtual meetings. However, as the name implies, these are *social media* platforms and may not be advisable for use for formal or official communications and meetings. Therefore, necessary precautions must be taken to ensure that sensitive official information or records are not compromised, sent to, and/or put in the possession of unauthorised persons or groups.

12. Managing workforce in the Nigerian University System under the New Normal

A typical university is a huge community though sizes may vary at different universities. Universities are large and complex organisations with myriad of activities (Ogbugo, 2013). Managing such systems or societies require strong interpersonal skills and abilities to communicate and work with a community of diverse orientations. By their very nature, universities attract and retain people with heterogeneous backgrounds, that is, people from different cultural persuasions, so, ab initio, a university is prone to conflict unless properly managed. This is why a body of rules and codes or manuals are put in place to guide conduct in universities (Otto & Ukpere, 2020). The code of conduct or rules define what is acceptable conduct, what is a nuisance and what is an offence in universities as a workplace.

The code of conduct or regulations define the reporting patterns, career structure and expectations of workers and management. For instance, in a typical university in Nigeria, the administrative structure will show that there are principal officers of the university. These would be the Vice-Chancellor and his or her Deputies, the Registrar, the Bursar and the University Librarian. These are the core management staff who are saddled with the day-to-day running of universities. As Chief Executive and Academic Officer, the Vice-Chancellor is responsible for managing the university (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). He or she is Chairman of Senate and all internal committees and boards, though he or she may delegate such powers to his or her appointees.

The Registrar is in charge of administrative duties, who by law is the Chief Administrative Officer and is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the day-to-day administrative work of the university except as regards matters (financial affairs) for which the Bursar is responsible (Akanji, 2018; Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). He or she is the custodian of the university records and oversees administrative staff and activities including recruitment, staff promotion, student affairs and public relations in many universities. He or she is also the Secretary to Council, Senate, Congregation, Convocation and other committees. To this extent, the onus of managing staff ultimately, is the responsibility of the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar, though the bulk of the work is administrative and under the Registry. Due to size, the day-to-day administration is delegated to line staff, such as Directors, Deans, Heads of Department and other Unit heads on a day-to-day basis. It is possible that a Registrar may never see or know a staff in the university throughout his or her tenure of office in the university. Staff matters get to the notice of administration on special occasions such as exceptional performance requiring commendation or promotion. Other issues such as annual leave, or when a need arises for staff redeployment to another department/unit or for discipline, can also attract the attention of central management. Staff are known and supervised by their functional heads of department or unit who ensure that the staff are at work and are performing optimally. So, management is largely a delegated duty in universities in Nigeria.

Management generally is the art or science of achieving goals, targets, or results through people and agents. It may also be defined as the art of achieving results through the utilisation of men and materials. It is about optimising resources or production factors to achieve outcomes. In the university, key outcomes expected are learning, teaching, research and community service. For the professional administrative and technical staff, they are involved with providing specialised ancillary services, such as admissions, data processing, storage and retrieval of records, ensuring consistent application of rules, among others (Tascovici, et al., 2012). The relevant unit head already has a delegated duty from the Registrar to achieve the key performance indicators of his or her unit. For instance, what is expected of the admissions officer, is timely admission of qualified candidates into the university in accordance with the university regulations. For Personnel (Human Resource) Officers, the expectation is different. Similarly, that of the Student Affairs Officer or Faculty Officer may be different though all largely involve processing and retention of records with a view to ensuring that stakeholders are

better served, leading to more research outcomes, greater learning, teaching and enhanced community service. The Registrar through his or her subordinate officers must ensure planning, effective organisation, and control outcomes of his or her subordinates. To achieve these outcomes, the Registrar, through the supervising officers, who are the unit heads or leaders need to:

(i) Set achievable goals and targets

(ii) Coordinate effectively

(iii) Motivate and discipline

(iv) Ensure availability of work tools including laptops, internet connectivity, and other tools required to drive WFH

These are briefly explained below:

(i) Set achievable goals and targets

To achieve efficient results from working from home (WFH), supervising officers must set measurable and achievable goals for the staff, more so, because these staff working from home will supervise themselves or at least will be out of the immediate reach of the supervisor. The only way to confirm if they are working is when they achieve the set goals. If they do not achieve the goals, necessary sanctions should apply. And these sanctions should be consistently applied to all similar situations. It is important to advise that these goals should be measurable and should be set in concert with the staff concerned in order to ensure that such volume of work can be achieved within the given time. Because it is measurable, subjectivity can be minimised as failures will be obvious to both the staff and the supervisor.

(ii) Coordination

In view of the size and plurality of universities including the various services they offer, effective coordination could be a challenge if the management is inefficient. The various aspects of the Registry must have coordinating officers who should ensure that activities under their units are done optimally. Such coordinators should reach individual members of staff under them at intervals to ensure seamless operations and where there are challenges, timely identify and resolve them. In this way, duties are coordinated as well as the staff. In fact, it is in this respect that university organograms provide for Senior Deputy Registrar or Director of Academic Affairs in the Registry to coordinate all academic records and units; the Director of Personnel Affairs or Senior Deputy Registrar in charge of staff matters; Council Affairs, Student Affairs, and such others.

(iii) Motivate and discipline

It is the practice in some places that unit heads meet with their staff regularly and they collectively plan on what and how to achieve set goals or desired outcomes. Once this is done, and agreements on targets have been arrived at, staff are allowed free hand to work at flexible hours. If such a staff needs to go for school runs, market or places of worship, he or she does so knowing fully well that there would be a time of appraisal. If the duty is to serve students such as registration, the minimum number of students registerable online per day is known both to the staff and the supervisor, the staff also may be motivated to ensure that no student complains of delays. If the work is achieved efficiently, then commendation, prizes, promotions or some specific actions of management to encourage others to emulate could follow. On the other hand, if a staff takes an undue advantage of WFH to sleep, loiter and fails to achieve targets, rules of consequences should follow. These may include reassignment to a different schedule, low appraisal scores, denial of annual leave, among others. Agreeably, these sanctions are difficult to achieve particularly in public universities due to sentiments or emotions of different dimensions which is currently plaguing the system, leading to low productivity and corruption. However, they are achievable especially with the use of e-processes, which can automatically time out when deadlines are not met. The role of discipline is critical in managing staff anywhere including universities (Ndu, 2016; Makinde, 2016).

(iv) Availability of work tools

Remote work and virtual meetings require the availability of technical experts that may be called upon when there are technical challenges in soft and hard ware. It also requires a pool of computer literate personnel who are conversant with the use of e-processes. These are in addition to the enabling environment which includes the various hardware and software, such as laptops, desktops, internet connectivity (data), among others, without which virtual meetings cannot take place. Management must proactively provide these items. Where it is not feasible for management to provide all the needed items, management could reach a compromise with staff by offering some stipends in lieu of items provided by the staff concerned. Staff require to be trained and updated with skills for the New Normal.

13. Recommendations

To beneficially adopt virtual meetings and remote work, the management of each university may need to:

I. Approve, formalise and document the use of virtual processes as an operational procedure for meetings, and remote work (working from home) in the particular university.

II. Employ and retain an adequate pool of technical staff who will resolve technical issues.

III. Encourage non-information technology compliant staff to retool or upgrade their skills which is a minimum requirement of the new mode of service delivery referred to as the New Normal.

IV. Provide staff with the required laptops, internet connectivity and power supply. Where these are unavailable, an allowance in lieu of these provisions may suffice. However, sensitive information must not be given to careless staff to process at home.

V. Create its own template for virtual meetings which can be printed on a one-page sheet/flyer. The soft and hard copies should be circulated to staff, to enable them to be on the same page.

VI. Streamline and simplify its email system and encourage staff to get used to email communications. This is necessary as appropriate email correspondences (sending of the Agenda and other working documents/briefs via email before meeting dates) precede fruitful virtual meetings, and the bulk of remote work is done via emails.

VII. Institutionalise a rolling basic information and communication technology (ICT) training for management and staff on common operating standards for virtual meetings, so that redeployment of staff will not affect operations in the university.

VIII. Ensure coordination of work and staff, set measurable goals for each staff, which should be regularly evaluated and rewarded, and if there are infractions, the staff responsible for these infractions should be sanctioned appropriately. This is the way forward in this New Normal in Nigerian universities. This new ethos holds promise of benefits for universities in Nigeria. Universities that are yet to cue in are encouraged to do so.

IX. Nigerians need to enhance their abilities to produce computer hardware as well as software, if not, the importation of these critical resources will erode the lean purse of the country and generate unemployment in the country.

On their part and for their own good, to be able to cope in the Nigerian University System under the New Normal, staff need to:

I.   Make themselves available for training and re-training programmes, whether physical or virtual.
II. Take advantage of every training organised for them by the university management or by professional bodies such as the Association of Nigerian University Professional Administrators (ANUPA), Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM), Chartered Institute of Personnel Management (CIPM), among others; be teachable, intentional and make deliberate effort to be IT compliant and improve their skills, as knowledge gained or skills acquired is an asset primarily to the staff.
III. Manage their time and other resources well, to achieve set goals or targets.
IV. Check their email boxes often, at least thrice a day, and respond to mails promptly.
V.   Prepare adequately and professionally, in scheduling and participating in virtual meetings. Proper and timely preparation prevent poor performance:

- Always put your *mic* on mute, except when you have been granted permission to speak.
- Make use of a headphone or an earpiece to maximize your hearing especially if your environment is noisy.
- Learn how and when to use the "chat box" and "raise hand" options respectively. If expected to turn on your camera:
- Dress properly.
- Sit upright.
- Ensure you are in a professional (table and chair) setting; you cannot have a bed,   hangers, clothes, etc., in your background.
- If you are using a phone or a tablet, ensure it is on landscape (horizontal) mode.
- The camera of your device should be set appropriately in such a way that shows your   portrait and not just showing one side of your face.
- Ensure you have good lighting

VI. Never abuse any privilege given to them to work from home.

14. Conclusion

Conclusively, the world of work is changing fast post COVID-19. Technology, especially telecommunication is being pervasively used to enhance the mode of service delivery in different sectors across the globe. This is applicable to

universities in Nigeria. Unlike the situation pre COVID-19, when official work was routinely provided mainly from office premises, in the post COVID-19, several administrative functions are efficiently performed through many technological platforms with better and greater outcomes. These include virtual meetings through Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Team (MS Teams), Google Meet, and many more. The use of remote work has also expanded the speed and efficiency of processing documents, therefore, enhancing the welfare of stakeholders. This is the new reality.

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