WORK ETHICS, DESIRABLE ATTRIBUTES AND DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES OF DATA PROCESSORS

A PAPER

PRESENTED

BY

MRS. RITA A. EWURUM
DEPUTY REGISTRAR/COORDINATOR/SCHOOL ADMIN. OFFICER
SCHOOL OF HEALTH TECHNOLOGY
FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI

AT

TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR CLERICAL OFFICERS AND DATA PROCESSORS

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI

APRIL, 2015

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY OWERRI

TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR CLERICAL OFFICERS AND DATA PROCESSORS FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI

THEME: DEVELOPING KNOWLEDGE SKILLS, WORK ETHICS, AND EFFICIENCY IN THE UNIVERSITY

TOPIC: *WORK ETHICS, DESIRABLE ATTRIBUTES AND DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES OF DATA PROCESSORS*

By

Mrs. R.A. Ewurum

Protocols

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is with utmost delight that I stand before this gathering to present a paper on **Work Ethics, Desirable Attributes And Development Of Skills And Competencies Of Data Processors**. I thank the Vice-Chancellor for the on-going staff development policy of his administration. To the entire Management of the University we also owe gratitude for their unflinching support to this all-important and laudable ethical re-orientation and capacity building programme aimed at encouraging staff to *pull up their socks*, that is, to embrace desirable work ethics and avoid unethical conducts and activities that impede not only the productivity of the office, but also the growth of the individual in a chosen field of endeavour.

Following the global integration in almost all fields of endeavour, office practice and procedure have also been caught in the web of information technology. This development has so much been intensified in the 21st century. *Safary Online (2014)* reminds us that with the advent of globalization powered by technology, "goods and service, capital and labour are traded on a worldwide basis and, information and research flow readily between countries".

In the Nigerian University system, at the threshold of the 21st century and prior to the new decade commencing in 2010, very few office procedures were automated. The inception of automation in office practice widened the scope of secretarial functions in the office to include Data Processing. In the Federal University of Technology, in line with the mantra of "quest for excellence" of the present Administration (Asiabaka,C.C. 2013), it is now possible for the Technology to efficiently operate e-senate, e-payment of salaries and other bills, negotiate essential linkages without much travelling, etc. Applications for transcripts are now made on-line; thus making work, faster and more pleasant.

There is a strong assertion in Management circles that the human resources of an organization are the most vital among its sources of production – man, machine and material. Thus, **these technological feats can only improve productivity if staff needed to do the work possess requisite skills and competencies**, bearing in mind the required ethical standards of the University.(Ewurum, R.A.,2014).

2.0   Conceptual Framework

It is necessary that we have a conceptual overview, definition as well as explanation of key terms that this paper will employ to serve itself to you my dear listeners.

2.01:   Ethics

Let us look at the term "Ethics" as that vital ingredient in human existence that guides people's behavior in relationships with one another. It is the outline or principles of right and wrong conduct; standards governing the conduct of a person, especially as a member of a profession or trade. According to Hornby (2010) it deals with "moral principles that control or influence a person's behavior ..." The Chambers Dictionary, New Edition, explains Ethics as dealing with morals, "concerned with human character and behaviour; a system of morals or rules of behavior ..., professional standards of conduct". Alh. M. Ahmed, quoting Sally N. Adukwu (2011) analyzed the term "ethics" as moral principles and values that govern behavior of a person or group with respect to what is right or wrong, thus, setting standards of what is good or bad in personal conduct and decision making and ensures that each behavior is anchored on knowing what is wrong or right.

All regulations, laws and policies that guide human organizations are usually wrapped in the professional ethics of the organization to achieve fruitful implementation of its policies. **Ethics** is a system of rules that govern the ordering of values in an organisation. That is why there are defined ethical conducts in various professions. It aims at identifying both the rules expected to control people's conducts and the benefits

derivable therefrom. Ethical issues, according to Akinsulere (2011) are situations, problems or opportunities that prompt a person to exercise choice among several alternatives. These alternatives will then be judged right or wrong, using the established yardstick.

We can, therefore, safely adduce that "Ethics" is the substance in which a successful career (including that of a Data Processor) is preserved. Every society, profession or trade that has no defined ethics cannot succeed in the global scheme of things where values and rules control behavior and benefits.

2.02   Work Ethics

When we place the above ingredients of ethics in the mold of workplace, what do we get? The workplace can simply be defined as a place where work is carried on. Any space or enclave used for the purpose of engaging in activities that would produce results in the overall achievement of an organization's objectives.

Work Ethics, therefore, is a set of rules and principles that control or govern activities and behaviours in a workplace so as to satisfy the yearnings of those who established the office in an appropriate and moral manner. It contains values based on diligence. It is a belief in the moral benefit of work and its ability to enhance character (*Wikipedia*).

According to Alh. M. Ahmed (2014) Work Ethics pertains to a person's attitudes, feelings and belief about work.

2.03 Attributes of a Good Data Processor

Attributes are characteristics, feature or quality inherent in a person or thing, affecting actions, decisions and relationships. *The New Chambers Dictionary (2005)* defines attributes as "... that which is inherent in, or inseparable from anything; that which can be predicated of anything ..." Desirable attributes connote acceptable behavior, characteristics naturally and intrinsically found in a person, or embedded in the person as a consequence of holding a certain position. This brings us to the issue of **two basic forms of attributes. These are personal and business attributes.**

When a person is deficient in any of the expectations of a position, profession or career, but finds himself in the position or trade, rules and regulations governing the position, profession/career will impose on him/her the standards of behavior for persons engaged in the profession or holding such a position. **Attributes are desirable only when they align with set standards in a given situation.**

2.04 Skills and Competencies of Data Processors

2.04.1 Data Processing

In every field of life, the world of work inclusive, data is treated as sacrosanct because of its value and usefulness in decision making that can save or waste lives, enhance the economic and social wellbeing of persons, organizations and nations.

While the *Oxford Advanced Dictionary, International Student's Edition* (2010), defines *data* as "facts or information, especially when examined or used to find out things or to

make decisions", *The New Chambers Dictionary (2005)* opines that it is "facts given (quantities, values, names, etc) from which other information may be inferred, such facts, in the form of numbers or characters, which can be input to a computer".

Data Processing can be seen as very vital in the life of an organization, without which the organization cannot lay hands on facts and figures necessary for policy-making. It involves the receiving of raw "facts or information", the use of ICT tools such as the computer, scanners, laminating machines, etc. to perform required actions as *input*, obtaining as well as presenting the results in form of *output*.

A **Data Processor** in the University is one possessing requisite qualifications, skills and competencies in handling data or information as prescribed in the Scheme of Service and in keeping with the Conditions governing appointment of staff of the cadre, for the benefit of the particular office where he/she is deployed and ultimately towards the achievement of the Vision and Mission of the University. This opinion does not preclude the conditions expressed in Section J.1 (B), sub-section 2.1.1 of the *Scheme of Service (2007), Second Edition, for Junior Staff* of the University.

2.04.2   Development of Skills and Competencies

The twin concepts of *skills and competencies* as crafted in the theme of this paper are aptly complementary. *Skill* describes expert and detailed knowledge of something; "ability to do something well" *Oxford Advanced Dictionary, International Student's Edition* (2010); "aptitude and competencies appropriate for a particular job" *The New*

Chambers Dictionary (2005). In the same vein, *Competencies* explain the capacity, capability, appropriate qualification to efficiently carry out an assignment or perform a function.

Skills and competencies are developed through learning or tutelage in a particular field after which the trainee/student is certified fit by a competent authority to practice the trade or profession. On-the-job training programmes, self sponsorships by staff concerned to upgrade one's level on the skill; attendance at workshops and conferences also contribute to development of skills and competencies of Data Processors. Sometimes somebody may possess natural aptitude for a skill area and can excel in it without formal training. This is different from the skill and competency required of a Data Processor.

3.00 Work Ethics and Desirable Attributes in the Data Processing Cadre

The function of data processing in organizations draws practitioners very close to the policy-making levels of the organization – what the local parlance describes as "**corridors of power**". The data processing role is a wide window into the secrets of the organization. Work ethics is emphasized because of its central place in the life of an organization.

When we talk of ethics in the workplace, expectations are high. For all persons working in the University system, it includes, but not limited to:

i.   Accountability

ii.   Honesty and Integrity

iii.   Obedience to rules and regulations

iv.   Effective communication

v.   Positive Interaction

vi.   Cooperation

vii.   Self-confidence and high moral principles

viii.   Willingness to adapt to situations of the workplace

ix.   Self-discipline

iv-viii above foster team building and team work, leading to increased productivity in the organization.

For the Data Processor, all the above are applicable, but owing to the nature of the occupation, schedule and function, the basket of ethics must necessarily embrace the following:

i.   Punctuality to work and in carrying out assignments, staying on seat and keeping away from gossips and rumor mongers.

ii.   Dedication to duty and loyalty to the system

iii.   Adaptability and team play – Being flexible to accept laid down conditions changes that enable the office achieve its objectives; being malleable and teachable, accepting diversity in human behavior in relation to co-workers.

3.1   Unethical Issues

It is unethical for a Data Processor to engage or be involved in any of the following actions or inactions:

i. Divulging secrets, or discussing information that comes to your knowledge in the course of your work to other persons.

ii. Dressing indecently or uncomfortably to work.

iii. Engaging in immoral relationships in the workplace.

iv. Misuse of office equipment or stationary

v. Extortion, effecting unauthorized changes in records such as admission lists, class lists, students' transcripts or examination grades, etc.

vi. Certificate forgery or abetting such actions.

vii. Keeping the office environment and data processing equipment unclean.

viii. Being slothful or sluggish carrying out instructions relating to your schedule.

ix. Dereliction of duty – purposely leaving work undone, especially when it forms part of your schedule. Most times lazy people do this to sabotage the office by slowing down work.

x. Lobbying for deployment in units suspected to be more "juicy" than your current unit, or rejecting posting to any unit of the University.

xi. Relying on "god father" for advancement in your job instead of hard work to market your skill and eminently qualify for progression.

3.2 Personal and Business Attributes of a Data Processor in the University

Two types of Attributes support work ethics for a successful career in the public service. They are the **personal and business attributes**. It is imperative that a Data

Processor possesses not only acceptable work ethics but also desirable attributes- both personal and business.

3.2.1   Personal Attributes

The qualities a good Data Processor should possess to function well in any organization, include the following:

i.   Willingness to work hard

ii.   Mental alertness

iii.   Honesty, integrity and trustworthiness

iv.   Cooperation

v.   Cheerfulness

vi.   Good personal hygiene and grooming – "cleanliness is the next to Godliness". Keeping or being tidy is intrinsic and reflects a person's total personality.

3.2.2 Business Attributes

As prescribed in The Scheme of Service for Data Processors, an educational qualification of G.C.E. O/Level is required at entry point and promotion thereafter, subject to the guidelines contained in the Scheme and Conditions of Service for the cadre. An efficient Data Processor should be able to handle the equipment and information without much supervision, especially in a situation where the immediate boss is not very conversant with the machine or the software required to perform a particular task, and deliver the document in record time. His/her other business qualities include:

i.   Tactful/diplomatic and possessing good human relations.

ii.   Dependability – worthy of being trusted with the most important documents and secret information in the system operated by the Data Processor. One who can be relied upon in times of emergency.

iii.   Initiative laced with accuracy – ability to be proactive when mistakes occur on issues of numbers.

iv.   Poise and neatness – as a member of the secretarial crew of the office, the Data Processor is a *de facto* secretary, required to brighten the office place with good carriage, dignity and self-confidence.

v.   Productivity-driven

vi.   Loyalty to the system and the authorities.

4.0   Development of Skills and Competencies

The computer as a product of technological evolution, has gone through many stages of development over the years and grouped according to its generations, dating back to 2600 B.C. Its invention followed the desire in the business world to handle complex mathematical, scientific and accounting solutions. The modern version of this technological innovation introduced changes in the workplace from the traditional secretarial practices to the present information super highway which has positively affected data gathering, processing, storage and retrieval. This collection of tasks performed by the machine form the basic data processing function.

The terms - **Skills and competencies – share etymological properties with expertise, proficiency, capability and experience**. These key capacities demand deep rooted tutelage in a well organized setting and for a specified period before practice.

The impact of the modern machines on office practice necessitated the acquisition of special skills on the operation of the machines to qualify for appointment in offices. Skills and competencies in the operation of any machine or equipment can only be developed through this means – data processing inclusive. Thus, the skill of computer operation is usually acquired through learning and apprenticeship that confer literacy in data handling. Here, the University's Scheme of Service, (2007) Edition appears very moderate or lenient in asking for O/Level qualification as basic entry point for data processors. Provision is made for on-the-job training of some new entrants. With the Computer Centre available in the University, the training of young ones fresh from the secondary school is possible. However, considering the huge importance of data to the livewire of the organization, especially in this age of electronic transactions, appointment of already certified practitioners is being advocated. Subsequently, the skills and competencies already acquired can be sharpened for greater effect in the actualization of the University's goals.

Skills and competencies are also developed through mentorship of senior colleagues when properly applied, granted and accepted. It is usually very helpful for new entrants into any career, who have the good fortune of securing appointment in the

university to acquiesce to the essential tutelage of practicing and willing senior colleagues.

For many employees of government establishments, improvement in their primordial skills does not have to wait for their employers. Here, self-help has assisted many to rise to the top of their career. People invest on their future by taking time to register for programmes related to their occupation (of course with the permission of their employers so as to lose their jobs). At this stage of information technology advancement, with new trends evolving everyday, Data handlers should endeavour to update their skills and knowledge in order to continue to be relevant in the field of work. For instance, few years ago, the electric typewriter, and even the manual type and their operations were a sight to behold. Today, the high flyers in the operation of electric/electronic typewriters who failed to migrate to the use of computers are now considered illiterates in data management.

5.0 Some Consequences of Improper Handling of Data

Many countries of the world are investing heavily on information and communication technology to sustain or improve their positions in the economic, social, political and military milieu. In all these, the major tool of operation is data in raw or processed form. This vital asset in wrong or incompetent hands can lead to loss of lives, jobs, position, civilizations, social or economic order.

6.0   Conclusion

This paper has dwelt on the utility of the Data Processor in the University, the skills, competencies, work ethics and attributes that enhance performance of the job to the benefit of both the employer and the employee.

Taking into consideration the crucial nature of data in the 21st century organizations, it is imperative that close attention be paid to the role of Data Processing in organizations. Nations have lost territories and wars as a result of mishandling of data; organizations have lost their market leadership among contemporaries in the same industry as a result of obsolete information technology applied in modern operations.

6.0:   Recommendations   for   Improvement   in   the Skills/Competences, work ethics and attributes of Data Processors in the University

Securing a job in the University is to join the league of lucky Nigerians in this era of high unemployment rate. Persons who enjoy this privilege should be tenacious in their effort to retain the job and grow in their chosen career as well as satisfy the employer's aspirations. I venture to suggest as follows:

1. Lack of constructive mentorship leaves a lacuna in the honest career progression of staff. As I mentioned in another forum, this aspect sits on a tripod – the mentor, the mentee, and the opportunity to benefit from the effort. A double jeopardy arises where the mentee becomes *unteachable* or where the mentor is only ready to *"teach to the test"*.

2. Given the resolve of the University Management to embark on graduated reorientation programme of this nature to accommodate the needs of all strata of personnel, it is advised that it be made continuous, at least biennially, to ensure a proper evaluation of the effect of each previous exercise.

3. Self-improvement in the use of ICT tools related to one's duties is advocated.

4. A review of the Scheme of Service with a view of engaging properly groomed and certified persons as Data Processors is advocated to save the University from laying bare important tools as data in the hands of "green horns".

5. Now that some areas of the University's administrative processes have been made to adopt the e-transaction procedure, it is time to extend this to other processes and essential networking duly effected to ensure easy access to needed data by all persons authorized to use them for quick decision making.