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MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS: A PANACEA TO ACHIEVING EFFECTIVENESS IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines management information system as a panacea to achieving effectiveness in university administration in Nigeria. Various concepts and terminologies relating to this topic were discussed. The characteristics and categories of management information systems and the rationale for computer based management information systems over manual management information systems in university administration were also looked at in this paper. The objectives of MIS in university administration includes; to organize information for planning, budgeting and decision making; to standardize the system of obtaining reports and statistical information on staff, students and financial matters. However, some of the challenges facing MIS in university administration have also been discussed. The paper concluded by giving some solutions to the challenges of MIS in university administration.

Keywords: Management, information system, computer, university education

Introduction

There is no doubt that information has come to occupy a central focus in the present age. This fact does not vary whether one is concerned with business, commercial, educational or any enterprise for that matter. Reliable, accurate and available information is crucial in the management of any organization. Whether the organization is in the private or public sector, or

institution of research and learning, there is the need to gather, analyse and communicate the state of affairs presently that will aid the managers in the management of the organization.

According to Aminu (1986), information is one of the resources that any organization needs to help it achieve the set goals. For the avoidance of doubt, MIS in institutions of learning is not synonymous with computer center or computer laboratories for teaching. MIS is a unit that supports administrative and management functions. The introduction of personal computer (PC) and the invention of internet facility is a major breakthrough in the history of MIS. The whole world has been turned into a global village, as data and information can be exchanged by people and organizations within seconds.

Nigerian universities are complex in terms of organizational structure, number and rapid increase in students' enrolment. This complexity is further compounded by the multiple goals of university education, as stipulated in the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education (2004). Alabi (1997) stated that universities all over the world generate voluminous amounts of data daily because of the nature of their administrative and research activities. To make effective use of such data, many higher institutions have utilized MIS (Gordon & Yang, 2004). The top decision-making body responsible for university education in Nigeria; the National Universities Commission (NUC) believes that developing an MIS for Nigerian universities would go a long way in effectively managing information for all the stakeholders in the university systems namely: teachers, students, administrators, staffs etcetera (NUC, 1989).

According to Obi (2003), MIS is useful in the area of decision making as it can monitor by itself disturbances in a system, determine a course of action and taking action to get the system in control. Fabunmi (2003) also maintained that MIS is useful in making decisions to solve many of the problems facing educational institutions. Such problems include poor programme scheduling, poor estimate of staff requirements, lack of accurate information on students, personnel and facilities, piling-up of administrative matters, wastage of space, lack of feasible budget estimates among others.

Concept of Management Information Systems

Lucey (1991) defined MIS as a system that converts data from internal and external sources into useful information to all levels of management and in all, functions to enable them make timely and effective decisions for planning.

directing and controlling the activities for which they are responsible. Sambo (1992) referred to MIS as a system using formalized procedures to provide management at all levels in all functions with appropriate information based on data from both internal and external sources. Kelly (1990) sees MIS as the combination of human and computer-based resources that results in the collection, storage, retrieval, communication and use of data for the purpose of efficient management of operations and for business planning.

Components of Management Information Systems

The term Management Information Systems consists of three major components of management, information and system. These three terms form the nucleus of MIS.

Management: This refers to the process of planning, organizing, directing, controlling the activities of an organization towards the attainment of goals.

Information: This refers to the data needed in an organization for the day to day planning, organizing, directing and controlling of activities for goals attainment.

Systems: This refers to a set of interrelated and interdependent parts arranged in a manner that produces a united whole.

Characteristics of Management Information Systems

Management Information System (MIS) is generally thought of as an integrated user-machine providing information to support operations, management and decision making to effectively function in an organization. According to Stedman (1999), the emergence of MIS has led to new vistas in organizations especially for their information management needs. The fulcrum upon which an effective MIS oscillates is a carefully conceived, designed and executed database. This is the heart of every MIS in any organization's environment. Some of the characteristics of MIS are:

- ♦ It is usually directed towards the management of an organization, be it formal or informal;
- ♦ It has a common data flow;
- ♦ MIS operates in areas of distributed data processing;
- ♦ It creates room for other subsystems to exist;
- ♦ Data form sources of input while information serves as output.

Categories of Management Information Systems

Fabunmi (2003) stated that there are two broad categories of good and complementary management information system which are; Manual Management Information System (MMIS) and Computer-based Management Information Systems (CMIS). Studies have revealed that in most sophisticated organizations, both manual and computer-based systems are used; in fact, both are held to be complementary in information handling procedures (Sanders, 1983). For better administration of the university, both the manual and computer-based system should be used.

Advantages of Manual Management Information Systems

1. It is easy and cheap to use. Files can be opened at very low cost for each of the management tasks or operations.
2. It can be used to preserve information for several years. Papers have the advantage of remaining intact even after several years of storage.
3. The manual MIS is very useful during power failure.

Disadvantages of Manual Management Information Systems

1. It is not easy to use the manual MIS to process complex data, which involves the use of complex tables, models and statistical analysis.
2. The use of manual MIS is time consuming and difficult.
3. It is not efficient and accurate while being used for processing and displaying information.

According to Fabunmi (2003), the following are the rationales for a computer-based MIS in educational institutions over manual MIS;

- (a) The complex nature of educational institutions demands complete computerization, which can be used for a computer network that will ease data exchange.
- (b) Most of the processes involve large quantity of data which the computers have the capability of processing quickly and easily. This is made possible through the Internet connectivity.
- (c) The computer-based MIS has the capability of solving different problems facing educational institutions. Some of the problems are; poor programme scheduling, poor estimated staff requirement, difficulties in preparing feasible budget estimates etc.

Objectives of Management Information Systems in Nigerian Universities

According to NUC (1987), the objectives of MIS in the universities are to;

- (a) standardize the system of obtaining reports and statistical information from the various universities on students, staff, financial matters and library.
- (b) record such information on diskettes or tapes at the universities and send to NUC for budgeting, information storage, analysis and retrieval purposes.
- (c) Ensure that such information are accurate and timely.
- (d) To organize information for planning, budgeting and decision-making.
- (e) Help the universities put in place effective management system and improve utilization of resources.

Relevance of Management Information Systems in University Administration in Nigeria

The adoption of MIS in the university systems, will not only pose unexpected challenges that will turn around the institutions roles, it will give practical solutions to problems confronting the general services of the university administrators, support staff and people within and outside the university community. Management Information Systems is relevant to the University administration. According to National open university of Nigeria course guide (2008), the relevance of MIS in university administration includes the following among others:

1. Provides information which assists in the control and evaluation of the universities performance. For instance, at the end of each calendar year, annual reports of events are recorded. Ereosun (2007) stated that this is necessary to determine the performance of the university. Through the use of MIS, statistical figures show the degree of improvement on the performance recorded over the years. Graphically, number of enrolments, withdrawal cases, successful completers etcetera are easily presented and used for decision-making by the university administrators.
2. Helps the university administrators in decision-making. In the university, at the Human Resources Management Unit for example, the application of MIS is very important in recording staff bio-data, number of Professors, Senior Staff, Lecturer I, and Lecturer II etcetera. At the click of buttons,

sought information are retrieved. Staff data are easily and quickly detected using MIS. Also, at the various units within the university, data on different types of materials on acquisitions can be seen at a glance; this helps administrators to decide what materials are in or out of stock. Records of goods supplied and issued to different departments and units are efficiently recorded for audit purposes.

3. MIS is also useful in collecting, organizing and storing up data. For instance, through staff profiles, data stored using MIS can be used to identify training needs of the administrative staff within the university. Topmost in the objective of any university are teaching and research endeavours. The training can be acquired through formal or informal education. Through workshops, seminars, conferences etc staffs can be refreshed. This is an essential ingredient of capacity building for university workers to develop personally and perform effectively on their jobs.
4. MIS also provide means to manipulate information for decision-making. Through the use of information from internet, intranet and access to local and international journals and textbooks new scientific discoveries are communicated worldwide. This revolutionized information handling promotes standards in university practices.
5. MIS permits use and re-use of stored information. To all universities, information is an essential ingredient, absence of which might result in unpleasant consequences. Information that concerns staff welfares, finances, infrastructures, facilities, equipment are relevant to all levels of management; is it at the lower, intermediate or top levels.
6. Well constructed and well organized MIS can provide university administration with the knowledge it needs to reduce operating costs and increased profits. MIS can help university increase efficiency by quickly providing critical information about procedures and operations.
7. MIS in the university will help to provide and enhance research through internet or network of services which aims at solving management problems and helps to get task achieved in a much easier, quicker and faster way.

Challenges Confronting Management Information Systems in University Administration in Nigeria

Like every good thing, one should say, establishment of MIS necessarily brings in its trail certain problems that should be identified with a view to alleviating them. According to National open university of Nigeria course guide

(2008), the challenges of MIS in university administration include the following among others:

1. Lack of administrators' involvement: most often the design of MIS is left in the hands of information specialists who may not know enough about administration. At times they do not appreciate administrators' true information requirements and of organizational problem.
2. Lack of top management support: top management sometimes does not encourage MIS due to various reasons often based on fear of the unknown.
3. Lack of computer knowledge: it is a glaring fact that most administrators at all levels of management have little or no computer knowledge. Therefore, it is always difficult for them to assist MIS designers to acquire and disseminate information.
4. Inappropriate emphasis on computer systems: too much emphasis is laid on the use of computer to the extent that other methods of information acquisition and dissemination are relegated to the background.
5. Problem of acquisition and maintenance of computer hardware and software: most computer hardware and software are not easy to acquire and maintain. This goes to emphasize that computer-based MIS is costly to establish nonetheless to maintain especially in this era of tight budgeting.
6. Problem of personnel: the MIS does not only require highly qualified and efficient personnel, its staff must also be dedicated, loyal and people of high integrity. Computer crime has been of serious concern to university administrators because of some of the manipulations that have been done on it with respect to students' results.
7. The fact that the MIS entails the central storage of data- classified and otherwise in the same place gives rise to the last problem, which is the security of data from unauthorized persons. This again has to do with the integrity of MIS staff.

Solutions to the Problems of Management Information Systems in University Administration in Nigeria.

According to National open university of Nigeria course guide (2008), the solutions to the challenges of MIS in university administration include the following among others:

1. Administrators should try to participate in the designing of MIS by giving

- the designers clues of what the university actually needs
2. Administrators at the top may not want their decisions to be challenged, thereby adhering to the slogan "this is how we have been doing it". Administrators at the top of the university administration should realize that the university's success is mostly determined by the environmental factors; and it is information that allow them to cope and manage the ever changing environment.
 3. At present, among the best means of processing data, acquiring and processing information is the computer. Since computer is the major tool of information technology, all staff of the university (administrative and academic staff) should try to have computer knowledge in order to help in achieving the success of MIS.
 4. Experienced personnel should be recruited to man the MIS: in addition, the integrity of MIS staffers should be an important factor in recruiting them. Also, close supervision of MIS staff should be taken seriously.
 5. Security precautions for the data and information in the management information systems should be put in place.
 6. Finally, a good remuneration package to serve as encouragement to MIS staff should be put in place.

Conclusions

The relevance of MIS in university administration cannot be over-emphasized. Reliable, accurate and available information is crucial in the management of any organization. MIS is a subject of the overall planning and control activities covering the application of humans, technologies and procedure of the organization. Management Information System (MIS) makes it possible for organization to get the right information to the right people at the right time by enhancing the interaction among the people in the organization, the data collected, it's various IT systems and the procedures it uses.

Management Information Systems is a necessary ingredient of educational institutions especially at tertiary institutions if they are to fulfill the objectives for which they are established. The MIS in the university should be able to store and process data related to students and staff personal data and academic records of students that is; registration, issuance of matriculation number, examination record processing and storage, inventory of institution's properties such as office accommodation of staff, classrooms and chairs/benches

As an educational institution grows, MIS allows information to move between functional areas and departments instantly, reducing the need for face-to-face communications among employees, thus increasing the responsiveness of the institution. MIS differs from regular information system because the primary objectives of these systems are to analyze other systems dealing with the operational activities in the organization.

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