

*Review Article*

Information and Communication Technology (ICT): A Veritable Tool for Executing Secretarial Tasks

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at information and communication Technology (ICT) as a tool the secretaries use in executing their tasks for achieving success at work, the paper discussed the duties of the secretary, the secretary as office manager as well as how the secretary could succeed in managing the available office technology facilities. The paper concludes that for effective and efficient management of office technology facilities, the secretary requires continuous learning, acquisition of new working skills, knowledge and experience which is ever changing in these technologically implied offices. At the end the paper made some recommendations to the secretaries.

Keywords: The Secretary, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Tool.

INTRODUCTION

This is an attempt to write on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a tool for secretarial tasks in office technology management. The secretary who works as an office manager is expected to achieve success at work (Akpormi & Ordu 2009). This paper had x-rayed the challenges of the secretary with regards to management of office technology facilitates available in his office. How the secretary could achieve success and improve his output through the optimal utilisation of ICT.

The Secretary

A secretary executive who has office skills in handling correspondences and has the ability to assume responsibilities without direct supervision to provide communication support services on matters of routine and administrative issues (Cletus 2011). Various office workers perform some aspects of secretarial work, but not all office workers are secretaries. Secretaries have more responsibility for their work. A

Professional Secretary performs tasks similar to an executive or administrative assistant. Secretarial function is just central in every organization and no office can easily function without a secretary. This brings about the importance of secretaries to the successful growth and development of the organization (Adam 2015).

Generally, secretary coordinates the daily routines of an office and organizes the office schedules and paper work which includes analysis of prevailing situations, judgement, technical knowledge and creativity (Adebayo & Akinyele 2012). The number and type of activities secretaries are assigned depend on whether they are generalists (multifunctional secretaries) or specialists (such as legal or word processing secretaries). Secretaries use many different talents and work with many different people. As an office professional, the secretary has the responsibility to organize the work flow so that the employer will feel that everything is under control, with all projects completed when needed (Chrissy

2008). Modern professional secretaries are now referred to as office managers by some people because of their activities, education, skill acquisition, knowledge and even expectations from their bosses, customers, clients and even the general public. Whether called a secretary, a manager or a personal assistant, a professional secretary is no more the man or woman sitting behind the typewriter, taking shorthand dictations and attending to visitors. Office management

Adam (2015), reported that a secretary is not just the company secretary that deals with legal matters of the organisation, but rather the position of the secretary is a basic position required in either the academic institutions or company formation or any kind of business set up to fill its general operation. Therefore, the secretarial practice which has been used by many organisations include the application of knowledge, skills, office practice procedures and methods of work performed by secretaries of different cadres in an organisations.

The introduction and application of modern technology advancements has brought a revolution and greater effectiveness in day to day working of the offices due to this, procedures have become more simplified and office work has become more interesting and challenging (Asabere & Enguah, 2012). What was commonly known in the modern world in terms of secretarial practice was that we only know typist grade, stenographer grade, receptionist, secretary, private secretary (PA), executive secretary and that is all. There is no any other hierarchy specified to the position of secretarial practitioners.

In his remarks Adam (2015), recounted that secretarial practice or rather secretarial profession has remarkably undergone series of modifications as it used to be in the past due to the availability of improved technologies of the modern office.

However, the system is still not being able to address the hierarchical positions of the secretarial cadre which was due to challenges faced by professionals and

managers in the past on how they could reshape or position the roles and responsibilities of the secretarial cadre which has a lot of misconceptions.

Retrospectively, a person who is employed as a secretary most possess typewriting skills, shorthand and good communication skills with good moral conduct and character (Onoyovwi, 2009). Today, secretarial practice has been revolutionized to the use of computers which are in abundance and are available in the offices (Onifade 2009).

Evans (2015) recounted that secretarial profession has come a long way from change in gender dominance (female) to technologies that have improved work output and increased job opportunities, administrative office roles have also remained an integral part of business operations, and all signs indicated that the secretarial profession is here to stay.

Secretaries have played and continued to play vital roles in their respective organisations for a very long time, but practice in the profession is taking too much time to change in the developing nations (Evans 2015).

Information and Communication Technology a Tool for the Secretary

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is defined as the tools, facilities, processes, and equipment that provide the required environment with the physical infrastructure and the services for the generation, transmission, processing, storing and disseminating of information in all forms including voice, text, data, graphics and video, (Asabere & Enguah, 2012). Therefore, it is evident that ICT is playing an important role in several sectors of world development. This development included the office management where the secretary also contributes as an employee in the organisation as well as the vital role the secretary plays in the achievement of the organisational goals and objectives (Justina 2013).

The work of the secretary in an organisation include the coordination and

management of the office environment, the management of his boss official activities and many other job that could be assigned to him. At this point, it is evidence that the work of the secretary is characterized by receiving information, recording such information, processing the information (within his office jurisdiction), and passing such information to the appropriate office (Onamade & Adedayo 2012). Thereof, information is a vital variable that the secretary uses in performing his duties.

Oyeronke (2012) reported that information accelerates the level of individual advancement as well as the level of corporate and educational development; he further reported that, Information is indispensable, and access to information is very crucial. Doyle (1994) recounted that information is a basic resource in today's society. Therefore, it is generally accepted that information is a data that have been processed into a meaningful and useful context which the secretary uses to execute his official duties. To further buttress this point, Adejimola, (2008) maintained that Information involves the transmission and reception of intelligence or knowledge. Nana & Education, (2008), held that, information is an amalgamation of data, images, texts documents, voices and many other items, intelligently organized to make meaning. James (2013) explains that information notifies surprises, stimulates, reduces uncertainties, reveals available options, influences individuals and expresses feelings among other roles.

The secretary, in dealing with information with regards to his official tasks, a large amount of resourceful initiative is required to achieve success (Cletus 2011). The need for efficient information dissemination which is among the major duties of the secretary has necessitated the secretary not to be left out of information and communication development. While in the past the secretarial profession is seen as playing a mere supportive role in the office, the present secretary has stand up to the challenges of modern office needs, because

his low performance and inability to urgently meet up with the technological changes in the office could pose a threat to his career (Onifade 2009).

The role of the secretary in dealing with ICT has changed over the past decade as management philosophies in the occupational world have also changed. Technical advances, new business procedures, and global markets are only a few of the forces which have contributed to the new demands on today's secretary's contributions towards ICT usage (Yacob 2011).

However, Hayes (2003), recounted that, advances in information and communication technologies have created a new space within which individuals and organizations can operate. Those individuals and organizations that have learned to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by operating in this new space have realized significant competitive advantages over those that have ignored the opportunities of the ICT advancements (Funmilola 2015).

It was observed that despite the level of awareness created on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) world-wide, it is embarrassing and disheartening those public services in the developed nations is still lagging behind Okediji (2004). This attitude necessitated delays in information processing, lack of necessary ICT competencies and lack of expertise in information handling, (Elham & Reza 2010). Although, ICT poses relative challenges to developing countries where the main challenges arise from international rules on copyright, database protection and etc, but at the same time offer opportunities (Okediji 2004).

It is well acknowledged that developed countries have already entered into the 'Information Age', an era characterized by electronic transmission and processing of information (Elham & Reza 2010). Technologies involving computers, computer based learning packages, interactive video and multimedia, audio graphic communication systems and video

conferencing have now emerged (Castells, 2010). For a very long time, secretaries have been using ICT in performing their different official duties.

As reported by Hepp et. Al. (2004), "ICT is playing a major role in the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge which are fundamental aspects of education process. This provides a greater opportunity for the secretary to acquire more knowledge of managing modern office technologies, continuous learning, and acquisition of new working skills and experiences which implied in using ICT. In this view, as regards to the secretary's learning potentialities in the office, Yuan & Sha (2012) reported that "learning is the basic cognitive activity and accumulation of experiences and knowledge. Further to the above assertion by Yuan and Sha, that "through the learning process, the secretary's performance will be improved thereby resulting to increase of his office experiences. Perceptual learning, cognitive learning and implicit learning are active research topics in the learning area" these methods would bring changes to the secretary's ICT skills and behaviours to his duties Hepp et. al. (2004).

The Concept of (ICT) to the Secretarial Profession

For a very long time, information has been one of man's priceless phenomena Ilori (1999). Man's preoccupation has been how to develop technologies that will facilitate the collection, storage, retrieval and communication by the fastest possible means.

Different scholars continued working until 1714, when manual typewriter, the first stage of office automation was invented. According to a Wikipedia search the typewriter which is word processing equipment that the secretary uses in doing his work is said to be a mechanical or electromechanical machine used for writing in characters similar to those produced by nowadays printers. It is manipulated by using of keyboard which was operated by key board striking a ribbon

to transfer ink or carbon impressions onto the paper. Typically, one character is printed per key-press. The machine prints characters by making ink impressions of the type elements. The internet is another important aspect of information and communication technology. Raphael (2011) reported that the history of the Internet started in the United States in the early 1960s.

The Nature and Scope of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

According to Ogbonna (2003), the computer is a telecommunication device, an electronic media that has brought tremendous changes in business operations and services. It has become a competitor of the print media in supplying information. Computer technology, with its ability to transmit, store and retrieve information has emerged as one of the major communication technologies in the world (Chesbro & Bonsall 1989).

People have relied on information systems to communicate with each other using a variety of physical devices (hardware), communications channels (networks) and stored data (data resources) since the dawn of civilization. Today's end users rely on many types of information systems ranging from simple manual (paper and pencil) hardware devices to the computer based information systems that use computer hardware and software telecommunications networks, computer-based data management techniques and other forms of information and communication technology to transform data resources into a variety of information products.

Information and communication technology play an important role in the successful secretarial management tasks of an organisation Ujunju et. Al. (2012). ICT is used to provide the information which an organisation need for efficient operations, effective management and competitive advantage Kandampully (2003). It is on this note that Nunes (2004) remarked that if information systems do not properly support the strategic objectives, business operations

or management needs of an enterprise can seriously damage its prospects for survival and success. Therefore, the secretary as an officer who is saddled with the responsibilities of handling the organisational correspondences must ensure that he is able to work competently with ICT facilities in order to ensure its full utilisation. Therefore, ICT competency is paramount to the secretarial profession (Adam, 2015).

The Place of Information and Communication Technology in Secretarial Administration

Technology enables individuals to coordinate the logistics of face-to-face meetings. Technology is also used to catalogue expertise of organizational members and as a result facilitating access to the right people and enhancing knowledge sharing (Zahra & Nasser 2013).

Computer-mediated communication such as electronic mail or computer-conferences can help to maintain continuity and connection between conversations, especially for those in different locations. Al-Hawamdeh (2002). An important focus of any management activity is the task of managing information, Eze (2000) believed that there are some compelling reasons why the modern secretary must be concerned with information and communication technology. Decision making are policies, objectives and plans interpreted into tangible actions, therefore, quality of decisions taken by management is critically dependent on the quality and quantity of information supporting the decisions (Shaker T., I.2011).

The new world order of competency in secretarial administration and the demands for technological advancement, transparency and responsiveness in governance have increased the need for efficient organisational information needs. Today modern organization (whether public or private) must promptly access adequate and timely information to remain relevant. The tremendous advances recorded in the

technology for the management of information (word processors, Internet etc) which now come at cheap rates have aided the average secretary to acquire the needed skills and utilize sophisticated information management systems (Akpomi & Ordu, 2009). This assertion makes information to be seen as vital resources available to secretaries for the performance of their duties.

Effective information management in an organisation promotes efficiency in the business operations, as well as enhances effective management of resources and competitive advantage. For instance, intercoms and ordinary telephones were the earliest forms of automated office communication especially with respect to voice messages. Currently, a whole array of advanced means of communication, including mail, facsimile transmission, remote conferencing and hand phones are now available in many offices. There is currently a wide collection of information processing devices at the reach of the secretaries in the modern office (Nwaoka & Okoli 2012).

It is on the foregoing that Akpomi & Ordu (2009) stated that, the functions and effectiveness of the secretary in every business organization depends on the availability of office technologies as well as the skills and competencies of the secretary. Organisations both public and private have come to appreciate the role and importance of the secretary as well as the need to provide the needed and necessary office machines and equipment for the efficient secretarial functions delivery.

Problems of Applying Information and Communication Technology (ICT) By Secretaries in an organisation

There are numerous problems militating against the maximum application of ICT by secretaries in their respective organisations which also affects their operational performance Ohiwerei, et. Al. (2013). Some of these problems as identified by Alasa & kelechukwe (1998) are:

- i. Poor and inadequate telecommunication facilities
- ii. Poor level of computer literacy
- iii. Poor computer facilities
- iv. Poor level of awareness of Internet facilities and importance of information.
- v. Ignorance of decision policy makers on the power of information network
- vi. On the economic and industrial development of the organisation.

Training Need for Optimal Utilisation of ICT in Executing Secretarial Tasks

Decisions and ethical collaborations made within an organization are made through combined efforts between the management and the staff of that organisation (Janie 2016). The global trend of technology in today's business climate has necessitated the need for training, although skill acquired during the training may not lead to the positive change in behaviour unless it is accompanied by motivation and a supportive environment.

It is understood that training is the systematic development of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to work effectively (Olaniyan 2008). Therefore, it is expected at the end of any training, a positive change of working behaviour will occur. There are documented evidences that training activities have a positive impact on the performance of individuals as argued by Kulkarni (2013) that training proves to be a parameter for improving the ability of organisational workforce for achieving the organizational objectives.

However, it is to be noted that a worthy training will surely result in promoting the essential goals of the organisation. Therefore, the significance of training in an organisation is instrumental to the organisation's development. Therefore, the significance of training is necessary because every organization that adopts a good training programme would have a controlled way of running its affairs and would have flexibility in the running of its

activities as well as be able to deliver consistent and positive productive results (Kulkarni 2013).

However, it is on this note that this study discovered the need for training and re-training of the secretary to be a very important issue for the development of both the secretaries and their organisations for effective and efficient secretarial service delivery. This is indicative because, some of the secretaries have developed self-motivation to learning new ICT techniques. Other respondents were keen in learning new working techniques in order to improve their productivity. A respondent was quoted answering a question from the interview on 'whether she sees ICT as a resource for learning secretarial skills and techniques' the responded that:

Although private or personal learning by the secretaries has limitations. The organisation where they work has the responsibility of training their employees. Therefore, proper training need to be given to the secretaries to learn new ICT techniques and go along with the global trend in ICT. In order for the secretaries to learn from the use of ICT, they need to undergo training which will help them acquire a good knowledge of the ICT techniques.

Training and learning is a necessary process for achieving overall objectives and it is also essential in improving organisational performance, therefore, training and development of staff is very important in any organisation. Employers should not look at the cost of training its staff, but they should look at the impending waste that awaits the organisation for having unskilled staff (Olusanya et. Al., 2012).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having discussed the ICT as a veritable tool for the secretarial tasks, the following recommendations were given, that:

1. Focus should be on the provision of internet services in the organisations.

- Although, the internet makes deception easier if abused, thus, the unethical secretarial practitioners might use it for clandestine motives. This must be checked by the management through the adoption of systematic supervision machinery.
2. ICT training must be put among high priorities list on organisations training budgets and training calendars to address the need for training the secretaries towards becoming professionals.
 3. Organising periodic training and development programmes that will further enhance the effective performance of secretaries. Training is an ultimate measure to attain a high level of productivity. Therefore, there is the need for training and re-training of the secretaries on ICT in order to realize maximum output.
 4. Secretaries should be enthusiastic to acquire additional skill bearing in mind that changes and advances in technology occur frequently in the profession and they should not be left behind in the use of the opportunities provided by ICT.
 5. Secretaries must realize that the previous training they had is no longer sufficient in the new world of office technology, therefore, they should regularly be ready to go for short and long term courses that will update their office management competencies as well as enhance their ICT skills.
 6. Secretaries without ICT skills need to be sent for courses as a matter of urgency, to sharpen their skills in ICT use because of the conventional nature of today's technology which needs continual update. This will equip the secretaries with skills to tackle challenges in an ICT dominated world.
 7. Secretaries should fully be involved to participate in managing the secretarial affairs of their organisations. They should be allowed to organize and manage meetings. Cover the meetings in taking minutes and participate fully in all the organisational affairs that relate to secretarial services. This is because in most of the organisations, the secretarial functions were hijacked by other administrative officers, although this may be as a result of the secretaries lack of adequate skills or experiences or due to side-lining of the secretaries by their bosses or could either be due to lop-sidedness or abuse of schedule of duties.
 8. That private business organization should procure as many modern office technological gadgets as are available in the market to ease the job of secretaries to enable them increase their productivity.

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