# HARNESSING THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY THROUGH SECRETARIAL PROFESSION

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**Abstract**
Earlier, the role of a Secretary was limited to taking note from their bosses, typing etc. However, with the advent of companies and offices, these duties have extended to things that were meant for the managerial staff.  The position of the office professional has greatly developed as technology continues to be relied upon in most offices throughout the country.  A wide range of duties that were once given to managerial and professional staff are now delegated to secretaries due to office automation and organizational restructuring.  Currently several secretaries train and inform new staff, perform internet research and troubleshoot the latest technologies in offices.  In spite of these recent changes, their usual and fundamental responsibilities have stayed constant conducting and organizing an office administrative duties and events, as well as receiving and handling information for dissemination to staff and clients.  Secretaries' responsibilities include various administrative and clerical duties needed to run an organization efficiently and smoothly.  In recent years, the secretarial responsibilities have undergone a vast change technologically.  Due to this reason, many people are opting for a career as a secretary.  The article presents a study on the changing work environment of a secretarial staff through Information Communication Technology (ICT).  It mentions the impact of computer technology on the growth of the global economy and its opportunities for entrepreneurs.
**Keywords:  Harnessing, Technology, Professional Secretary**

## Introduction

Nigeria, as an emerging economy, needs modern secretaries if it is to achieve its economic goal.  The importance of an office in the development of an economy cannot be overstressed.  It is the secretary that manages the basic office resources.  He manages tangible and intangible, human and non-human resources, such as personnel, machines, money, time, information and methods.

The office is undergoing an impressive revolution which affects the status of

the secretarial profession. There is no profession that is as dynamic as the secretarial profession. This is a truism. It is therefore only the secretary that can withstand the changes and challenges of the modern office and survive them. These changes and challenges can be seen in innovation and invention pertaining to equipment, furniture, form designs, nomenclature, environment, technology, attitude, dressing, responsibilities, training, skill, ability, knowledge, educational institutions and their curricula.

We now have graduates of polytechnics and universities as secretaries, thus posing new challenges to the old secretaries and creating a sense of job insecurity for them. In Nigeria, secretaries used to train in roadside secretarial institutes, Federal Government Training Centres and Staff Development Centres by State Governments, all of which are declining gradually. The inadequate qualification and training in office management, for the old secretaries, affect their perception of Office situations and the world of work in general.

## Secretary
Onifade (2004) defined a secretary as "An assistant to an executive, possessing mastery of office skills and ability, who assumes responsibility without direct supervision, displays initiative, exercises judgment, and makes decisions within the scope of her authority.

## Third Millennium
The third millennium is the period in years from 2000 to 2999. The first millennium consisted of years 1-999 and the second millennium was years 1000-1999.

## History Of Secretarial Profession
Literature on the history of the secretarial profession shows that nobody knows when secretaries originated, but the Romans were first to employ men as scribes who took down dictation. Men dominated secretarial jobs until the late 1880s. However, in the 1930s, women started to dominate the profession. Later, polytechnics were established by both state and federal governments in order to have better trained secretaries. At present, we have a few universities with a Secretarial Administration Departments where secretaries are trained. The polytechnics are still regarded as the best place to train secretaries. Secretaries command high respect and they easily get jobs. They are versatile because all organizations need them.

In the early days of producing secretaries in Nigeria, people regarded those who went to commercial secondary modern or commercial secondary schools as dullards. The public regarded those who went to secondary grammar schools as highly intelligent – those who would become doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. Things have interestingly reversed as commercial or business courses are becoming

more versatile than the science courses.  We now find doctors and other professionals who write accounting examinations.

## Professionalism In The Secretarial Profession

The American Dictionary (1980) defined professionalism as the "professional status. Methods, character or standards".  A profession is also defined as an "occupation or vocation requiring training in the liberal arts or the sciences and the advanced study in a specialized field or the body qualified persons of one specific occupation or field." A professional is:    "one engaged in a specific activity as a source of livelihood."

*"The ethics of a secretary and office professional are moral principles relating to the job that you will be bound by."  These ethics include confidentiality, honesty, loyalty, reliability, responsibility, working unsupervised (meeting deadlines, setting priorities), cooperativeness, flexibility, multi-skilling (learning as much as possible about computer programmes and other positions in the firm), and bribery (do not be tempted to accept gifts of favors from internal or external clients just in case there is an underlying reason).*

The third millennium secretary is a professional.  As such, he should be properly trained and should imbibe the principles of professionalism, and personal and business attributes of a secretary.

## Characteristics Of The Traditional Secretary And His Environment

There is no gain in saying that the traditional secretary and his environment are different from the millennium secretary and his environment.  However, the secretary has always been an indispensable human resource for the chief executive. The secretary is a subordinate who assists his boss.  The traditional secretary is one who existed in the first and second millennium.

## Academic Qualification

He attended roadside institutes and his basic entry qualifications are primary school certificate secondary modern school certificate, and secondary/grammar school fourth year certificate (G4).

## Skills

He should possess high- level shorthand and typewriting skills.  To be efficient in the office, he was expected to write between 100-200 words per minute in shorthand and type between 50-60 words per minute.

## The Environment

Some of the machines that traditional secretaries used were typewriters (manual, electric, electronic), franking machines, Dictaphone, dictating and stenographic machines, multigraph, power statistical accounting machine, bookkeeping and billing machines, etc.

The office of the traditional secretary was closed, decentralized and partitioned. To aid in filing and indexing, wooden and steel cabinets were used for keeping visible card records, visible loose-leaf records, rotary indexing equipment, edge-punched cards, and line reference equipment.

They were generalist secretaries, not specialist secretaries, and their jobs were routine in nature.

## The Third Millennium Secretary And His Environment

The third millennium secretary is facing a lot of challenges and changes. He is, therefore, in a world of "survival of the fittest". The challenges and changes are in his academic qualification, acquisition of skills, the environment, roles and responsibilities, office hazards and nomenclature.

## Academic Qualification

Secretaries today attend tertiary institutions (polytechnics and universities). The curriculum of the secretarial course keeps changing to include internet application, word processing, desktop, publishing, records management, time management, business law, accounting, information and communication technology, etc. For small organizations, secondary school graduates with basic skills may be employable.

## Acquisition of Skills

The emphasis on shorthand is being reduced, but the emphasis on typing is maintained because of its usefulness on the computer keyboard. He must be versatile on many tasks. He must be proficient on the computer.

## Environment

The office has moved from closed to open. Although we still have closed offices, we have more of open than closed. The open offices have more advantages than disadvantages, especially in terms of cost and supervision. Equipment is not duplicated, computers are now common devoid of manual typewriters, the office furniture is more comfortable, there is less paper usage, and the office now has more space devoid of many file cabinets and most offices use air-conditioners since fans are becoming outdated. Because of the air-conditioner, most buildings are poorly ventilated.

## Roles and Responsibilities

The secretary is an assistant to the Chief Executive Officer. He plays supportive roles;
However, the third millennium secretary's role has increases. Apart from the traditional
responsibilities, such as typing etc, he should be able to answer some questions on behalf of the boss. He should be able to coordinate the administrative activities and organize the office for efficient performance. He should be able to use internet and train new staff on the computer. The secretary is a member of a team in the workplace and therefore should always be cooperative and supportive. He should be able to write and present reports and disseminate information using websites and e-mail. He now shares with the manager the responsibilities that were hitherto reserved for the manager.

## Nomenclature

Because of the changes in roles and responsibilities of modern office secretaries, their titles have also changed. The secretary is now given many titles, such as office coordinator, executive assistant, office manager, administrative professional, government secretary (parliamentary private secretary, secretary of state, etc.), medical secretary, legal secretary, bi-lingual secretary, technical secretary and office professional, etc. The millennium secretaries are now specialized and their new titles show their areas of specialization.

## What Is Technology?

The term can either be applied generally or to specific areas: examples include construction technology, medical technology and information technology. It is also being referred to as the application of science, especially to industrial or commercial objectives. The scientific method and material used to achieve a commercial or industrial objective.

## Information Technology

Information technology has dramatically changed all aspects in business and industry in modern society. These technology developments have adversely affected the jobs of many people. To understand information technology Bennett (1997) defined it as acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of information using computers. Information technology includes: a computer, a computer programme – word processor, a calculator, compact disk, fax machine, telephone, and so many more. Information technology is widely used in offices today. In many organizations, you will find people sitting at powerful work stations and personal computers doing their own information processing. Some of these people may be performing simple tasks such as writing letters, generating graphs and others developing sophisticated or order-entry systems. Information revolution has

revitalizing force throughout the world. According to ITU statistics, those countries which have invested in ICT have ha income, human capital, legal quality and banking sector development associated with technology penetration rates. While in developing countries like Nigeria, there have been minimal benefits in ICT usage.

Many organizations today have not lagged behind in development of information technology, most of them have chief information officers or information technology departments to oversee all the uses of information technology in their organization, In addition to this there is use of telecommunications networks, electronic mail, electronic meeting system to coordinate work activities.

When computers were first introduced into business, predictions were made that there would be changes in management and organizations. The information processing power and programmed decision making capability of computer based information system were supposedly going to cause drastic reduction in employees. These predictions have come true as improvements in information technology are partly responsible for the downsizing of organizations, Stooner (2001). Popular titles now are administrative assistants, executive assistants, office manager, coordinator and specialists. Communications skills and class are required for tasks such as preparing conference, working with clients and coaching staff.

Secretaries and administrative assistants will keep on playing an essential role in the majority of organizations and technical inventions cannot replace these personal skills. The Government has not lagged behind in the development of information technology. A Secretary has key and instrumental responsibilities in an organization. While she has been regarded as a member of supporting staff in organizations, with modern office technology, she should be better placed in playing a vital role in the core functions of the organizations.

## The Concept Of Information Communication Technology

ICT is an acronym that stands for Information Communications Technology.

However, apart from explaining an acronym, there is not a universally accepted definition of ICT because the concepts, methods and applications involved in ICT are constantly evolving on an almost daily basis. Its difficult to keep up with the changes-they happen so fast. These equipment include:- a fax machine, calculator, electronic mail, telephone, copy printer, word processing, photocopier and many more. According to Rackham (2001) today's improvement in communication has continued to increase with portable telephones, fax machines, telephone systems becoming digitized and more versatile. Internet linking millions of people and organization worldwide, linking together of information systems to use an 'information super-highway'.

Information technology is used in the office today more than ever before. In the recent Environment people may forget just how unbelievable the notion of a "personal" computer In the home would have seemed to the pioneers of computing in the 1940s, when a single System with less power than today's personal computers could take an entire building (Rackham, 2001).

ICTs can enhance people's access to information, change flows of information and Communications, and provide traditionally disadvantaged groups with communication Channels.

ICT in daily life according to Moira (2003)
- Bill generation and management – gas, electricity, water and telephone
- Airline booking – on-line banking, insurance, claim processing
- Money – automatic teller machine (ATM) or debit and credit cards
- Vehicle registration – census data
- Medical records – use of expert knowledge
- Supermarkets – bar code readers, identify the product
- Library – electronic tagging facilities

Technology has changed both the financial and telecommunications sectors in developing Countries and spawned a lucrative industry for mobile money, (Olga, 2009).

## Role Of Information Technology In Organizations

According to O'Brien (2003) e-business and e-commerce systems are revolutionizing the operations and management of today's business enterprise. Thus information technology plays a great role in organizations. It supports information processing tasks using information technology tools to capture, convey, create, cradle and communicate Information. It also supports decision making tasks through decentralizing computing – organizing all information in one location and providing workers with information technology tools to access information. It supports innovations determining how it can significantly alter what the organization does to achieve the greatest advantage.

## Secretaries And The Use Of ICT

The functions and effectiveness of the secretary in every business organizations

depends on the availability of office technologies as well as the skills and competencies of the secretary.

Automation is an innovation and a consequence of the industrial revolution. Spencer (1981) defined automation as the process of replacing human work with work done by machines or systems designed to perform specific combination of action automatically or repeatedly.

The role of secretaries has changed tremendously from that of typewriting and shorthand Dictation, answering of telephone calls and processing of mails. Today's secretaries are Exposed to office technology including the internet that make work much easier and Knowledge more accessible (Edwin, 2008).

Secretaries perform a variety of administrative and clerical duties necessary to run an organization efficiently. They serve as information and communication managers for an office; plan and schedule meetings and appointments; organize and maintain paper and electronic files; manage projects, conduct research, and disseminate information by using the telephone, mail services, Web sites and e-mail. Many secretaries provide training and orientation for new staff, conduct research on the internet and operate and troubleshoot new office technologies.

Merony (1983) believed that a secretary may be well versed in the following specific automated office equipment training.

Concept and theory of specific automated office equipment knowledge of the categories of equipment and their intended uses and differences the skills to use resources or reference materials properly hands-on equipment training.

**Benefits Of Information Technology To The Secretary**

As the alter ego of the boss, the secretary needs timely and accurate information to meet business objectives. The day-to-day function and activities of the executive are relatively unstructured, unpredictable, and not very rhythmic. Much of executive time is spent attending meetings, absorbing information, negotiating, talking on telephone, solving difficult problems and making decisions. With the current technology, the executive is able to perform using information systems such as Decision Support System (D.S.S.) which helps to support management decisions and Management Information System (M.I.S.) used for strategic planning and management control (Stoner, 2001). M.I.S. not only indicates how things are going, but why and where performance is failing to meet the plan. Enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems integrate internal and external management information across an entire organization, embracing finance/accounting, manufacturing, sales and service, customer relationship management. Their purpose is to facilitate the

flow of information between all business functions inside the boundaries of the organization and manage the connections to outside stakeholders.

## Duties And Responsibilities Of A Modern Secretary

As the reliance on technology continues to expand in offices, the role of the office professional has greatly evolved. Office automation and organizations restructuring have allowed secretaries to assume responsibilities once reserved for managerial and professional staff (Meriam, 1983). In spite of these changes, however, the core responsibilities for secretaries have remained basically the same. This is performing, coordinating an office, administrative activities, storing, retrieving and integrating information for dissemination to staff and clients. They serve as information and communication managers for an office, plan and schedule meetings and appointments, organize and maintain paper and electronic files, manage projects, conduct research and disseminate information by using telephone, mail services, websites and electronic ,ail. They also handle travel and guest arrangement (African Journal, 2009).

In addition, secretaries use computers to do tasks previously handled by managers and professionals, such as to create spread sheets, compose correspondence, manage database, create presentation, reports and documents using desktop publishing software and digital graphics by use of the following software:

| Application | Use |
| --- | --- |
| Word Processing | for instance, Microsoft, Write letters, reports and many more |
| Spreadsheets | for instance, Microsoft Excel, analyze financial information, calculations; create forecasting models and others |
| Database | for instance, Microsoft power point, make presentations, either Directly using a computer screen or date projector, publish in digital format via e-mail or over the internet |
| Desktop Publishing | for instance, Adobe In-design, Quark Express, Microsoft Publisher, produce newsletters, magazines and other complex Documents |

Graphics for instance, Adobe photoshop and illustrator: Macromedia software freehand and fireworks, create and edit images such as logos, drawings or pictures for use in DTP, web sites or other publications.

According to Meriam (1983) in the past, secretaries have sometimes been critised for displaying a lack of initiative in seeking out and accepting additional responsibilities. However, she argues that secretaries have been placed in positions

of responsibilities without being delegated enough authority to carry out the responsibility. The current global outreaches of business and resultant pressures affecting managers have caused them to rethink the secretarial function and to delegate more responsibility and implementing authority to the secretaries. In addition to arranging conference halls and supervising other clerical staff, they handle more complex responsibilities such as reviewing incoming memos, submitted reports to determine their significance and to plan their distribution. They also prepare agenda and make arrangements for meetings and committees and executive board.

According to O' Net online –created for U.S. Department of labour, secretaries duties and responsibilities include: providing high-level administrative support by conducting research, preparing statistical reports, handling information requests, and performing clerical functions such as preparing correspondence, receiving visitors, arranging conference halls, and scheduling meetings.

According to O' Net online, secretaries also bear the following titles, Administrative assistants, Executive assistants, Executive secretary, Administrative secretary, Office manager, Administrative coordinator, Administrative aide, Administrative associate, Executive Administrative Assistant and Secretary.

**Impact Of Information Technology**

Technological development have freed secretaries from many time-consuming routine tasks to enable them to be employed in more specialized areas (Meriam, 1983). For example, a secretary may now retrieve information from a computerized file without having to leave the workstation. Desktop and pocket calculators have greatly streamlined and speeded accounting procedures, sophisticated copying equipment enables secretaries to handle paper works with relative ease. Word processing system and typewriters with automatic correcting features expedite processing of written communications.

Highly sophisticated telecommunications equipment systems are now available to facilitate and speed oral business communication, while electronic mail system facilitate rapid transmission of written communication.

An automated office, undoubtedly offers new roles and responsibilities for the secretary. Such new role presupposes that additional training and qualifications are required from the secretaries. The relevance of automation in business was identified by (Aromolaran, 2003) as follows:

- Creating a distinct career path for the secretary
- Automation creates a prominent place for the secretary on the

organization chart
- Creates routine and assigned roles for the secretary
- With automation, the secretary now spends less time in correcting, revising, proof-reading and reproduction of documents

With the introduction of automation, the manager's work is produced faster with professional touch. The manager is also able to concentrate on a more creative task with the presence of an experienced secretary assisting him. Spencer (1981) opined that automation remains a prominent factor that has contributed immensely and positively to the complete information processing revolution.

A significant result of technological developments is the division of secretarial careers into what are now generally called administrative support (A.S.) positions and word processing (WP) positions (Smith, 2013). In many offices, the installation of word processing equipment has effectively created two separate career paths:

- Administrative secretary – who tends to telephone and mail messages, handles files, and arranges executive travels and meetings
- The word processing or correspondence secretary – whose work centres on activities in the word processing. The word processing centre, however, is a far cry from the steno pool of the old, where the work was fairly routine.

**Negative Impact Of Technology To The Secretarial Profession**

However, information technology has had some negative impacts on secretaries. Zikmund (1995) states that the use of Voice mail coupled with increased use of micro-computers by managers, has substantially reduced the cost of secretarial help. On the other hand, middle-level managers such as departmental heads or plant managers, are usually responsible for administrative control and coordination. Much of the information to them is now available to top management if the organization has a comprehensive information system. For this reason, some people think that the need for middle-level managers will be reduced by computers. Others predict that their roles may be expanded and changed (Koontz, 1990).
Managers and professionals have assumed many tasks traditionally assigned to secretaries. Such as keyboarding and answering telephone.

**Challenges In Utilizing Information Technology**

The challenges include:-
- Reading, signing and sending out some executive correspondence
- Preparing rough drafts of executive responses to communications
- Composing speeches, memorandum, or reports for executive to edit

- Composing articles for publication, editing copies prepared and typed by others
- Consulting references sources to obtain information from various sources for executive use
- Other challenges include inadequate modern equipment, lack of training and lack of delegation by managers
- On the other hand, managers face challenges as well. While a high school student may feel comfortable using computers, some managers fear it. The reason for frar is that they are afraid of looking unskilled, if they are not able to understand new technology.

## Summary

From the study, it shows ICT evolve rapidly and office workers including secretaries have to keep abreast with these technologies. From the literature reviewed, cost has been mentioned and some hindrances to ICT in developing and developed countries. Business firms and organizations invest too little in training in ICT and therefore these firms and organizations cannot compete favourably without the use of technology. Sustainability of ICT has also been a problem. Information technology is used by various workers and it's a challenge to everybody using it today ranging from clericals, secretaries and managers.

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