

THE ROLE OF A SECRETARY IN MOVING AHEAD IN ADVANCED TECHNOLOGICAL ERA

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Abstract

We live in a wired, globalised world in which communication and globalization are possible. Corporations, industries and companies have become multinational. Fast connections through advanced technologies link corporations and offices with workers. Today's office environment has become complex by the driven force created by advanced technology. Seeing the acumen with which the technology works, most people believe that it will put secretaries out of employment. In the light of this, this paper discusses the concept of advanced technology, the requirements of a secretary in advanced technological era, the potentials of advanced technology and the functional role of a secretary. The paper concludes that the fear that advanced technology will lead to unemployment of secretaries should not be entertained as technological tools cannot replace the articulate, creative, thinking and dynamism of secretaries. The paper finally makes recommendations that can help sustain acceptance and usability of advanced technology by the secretaries to enhance effectiveness and efficiency.

Keywords: Role, Secretary, moving ahead technological era

Introduction

Advanced technology creates the challenges of providing professional secretaries with tools and competencies that enable them to succeed and participate in ever complex and changing world of secretarial profession. In a world of dramatic technological and social change, secretaries need to cultivate a variety of new types of knowledge to make secretarial profession relevant to the demand of millennium. It is assumed in this paper that advanced technologies are altering every aspect of secretarial profession and that secretaries need to comprehend and make effective use of them both to understand and transform secretarial practices.

Secretary Defined

The secretary is a staff of any organisation that is trained in office administration and management, acquired secretarial skills and is competent to function efficiently and

effectively in any organisation. He /she possesses skills in the use of office machines, transcription, communication and so on. As defined by Michael (2008), a secretary is a person employed in an office working for another, who deals with correspondences, keeping records, making appointments for a particular member of staff or for any organization. Similarly, Okoji (2008), defines a secretary as an assistant to executive, possessing a mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibilities without direct supervision. Also, Nwosu (1999) is of the opinion that a secretary is any person who possesses and uses a mastery of stenographic skills (Shorthand) and keyboarding plus clerical and management skills in processing office information. Thus, the secretary must possess superior secretarial skills in such highest degree of efficiency in Keyboarding, Shorthand, Office Practice, Communication, Language skills and general business knowledge. Corroborating the above definitions, Marshall (1998) describes a Secretary as a person who possesses a mastery of office skills and abilities to assume responsibilities, display initiative, exercise judgment, and make decision independently. The person should have robust capacity of engaging in routine management functions of planning, organizing, controlling, budgeting, advising and supervising subordinates. These definitions are comprehensive and fall in line with the world expectations of a secretary in the era of advanced technology.

Technology Defined

The word technology means different things to different people. Technology is purpose human activity which involves making products as diverse as clothings, foods, artifacts, machines, electronic devices and computer systems, collectively referred to as “the man made world”. Technology can also mean the special kind of knowledge which technologists use when solving practical problem, (Joseph & Esther, 2009). Harrison (1998) asserts that technology is the process whereby correspondences are turned out at a faster rate with the use of computers, word processors, microcomputers, desktop computers and other sophisticated office machines. This implies that technology has brought a generation of machines into the offices and labour market generally.

In the same vein, Machonald (2002) sees technology as the practice of any or all applied sciences that have practical value or industrial use of technical methods in a particular field of industry, arts like technical nomenclature, technical means, skills and characteristics of a particular group or period. Similarly, Collin-Gen (1999) asserts that technology is the application of practical, mechanical sciences to industry, commerce, technical methods, skills and knowledge. Similarly, Ohakwe (2001) sees technology as the form of invention or innovation or mechanization which combines the elements of computer, transfer devices and automated control.

From the above definitions, there is no gaining-saying that the meaning of technology focuses attention on things like technical, science, elements of computers etc. This is to say that technological machines are scientific in nature, technical and mechanical in

operations. Therefore, their range varies in that there are wide differences in operational complexities of international and sort of corrective of adjustment which can be made automatically.

The Concept of Advanced Technology

Advanced technological revolution brings into open the restructuring of secretarial practice. It demands new skills, ideas, ideology, skills, competencies, literacies and practices.

According to Komolafe (2009), the various definitions of advanced technology could be said to be an improved or specialized system application of scientific knowledge to produce goods and services. Thus, it is the organisation of improved ideas and knowledge for achievement of practical purpose. For instance, the primitive man generated fire through the frictions of two stones, long ago but now the means of generating fire has improved and fire is now generated from matches, lighters, gas, and electricity. In the same manner, beads were used as neck-lace but now we have gold and silver neck-lace. Also, stones were used to mill peppers, and maize but now milling machines are used. Furthermore, clay pots were used for cooking which has now been replaced with aluminum pots.

Nte and Adam (1998) refer to office equipment used in the past as traditional technology and the equipment used in today's business office as technological advanced equipment. From this assertion, traditional technology can be said to be manually operated equipment while advanced technology equipment could be considered as innovations and inventions which offer efficiency and facilitate office work through electricity controlled means.

Many people in the business world today associate the term “advanced technology” with “Word processor” although, word processor increases the effectiveness and efficiency of secretarial duties such as document preparation, document filing, sending and receiving of text messages and keeping calendar. However, advanced technology is beyond word processor. It is synonymous with automation, modern technology and technological innovations in the office.

Requirements of a Secretary in Advanced Technological Era

Kelly (2010) identifies the following five categories of skills for a modern secretary in this advanced technological era.

1. **Digital-age literacy**
 - a. Basic, scientific, economic and technological literacies
 - b. Visual and information literacies and
 - c. Multicultural literacies and global awareness
2. **Inventive-thinking**
 - a. Adaptability and managing complexity
 - b. Self direction

- c. Curiosity, creativity
 - d. High-order thinking, sound or abstract reasoning and sound judgment
 - e. Conceptualization/algebraic, log flow
3. **Effective communication**
- a. Learning, collaborative and interpersonal skills
 - b. Personal, social, and civic responsibility
 - c. Interactive communication
 - d. Grammatical and communication skills
4. **High productivity**
- a. Prioritizing, planning, and managing for results
 - c. Effective use of real world tools, computer fluency, keyboarding and accuracy skills, using advanced technological tools,
 - d. Ability to produce relevant high quality work such as all types of letters, memoranda, advanced technological tools, minutes of meeting, reports, documentations etc.

5. **Need for literacy in new skills**

To be literate today involves acquiring new skills, including those of using advanced technology, understanding science, having global awareness and most importantly, having the ability to keep learning which involves processing, analyzing, synthesizing and presenting wholesome information as well as communication and collaboration. According to Soukhano (1990), free online tools can play a large role in helping the secretary acquire those skills.

In the same way, Kenny(2011) asserts that the old way of doing things is presentation driven through which information is delivered and tested. This approach prepares secretaries for tasks that require simply following laid down directions and role skills. Kenny stresses further that the new way is collaborative with information shared, discussed, refined/role fashioned with others and understood deeply. It thus prepares secretaries to become part of the nimble workforce that makes decisions and keep learning as the workplace changes. What makes the difference is preparing professional secretaries with 21st century skills, using a flexible approach through advanced technological tools.

Potentials of Advanced Technologies

According to Jack and Suri (2010), one exciting aspects of advanced technologies is that they offer diverse programmes that could replace the traditional few application suites. Some perform the familiar functions, such as presentation tools. However, while they may not have every feature of Microsoft word, excel or PowerPoint, there is advantage of having softwares that use web based. Secretaries at different computers, can use the softwares to collaborate in a single document or on sets of documents at the same time.

Comparison of old and new ways of working technologies

| <u>Old</u> | <u>Advanced</u> |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| Application based | Web based |
| Isolated | Collaborative |
| Licensed / purchase | Free |
| Offline | Online |
| Single creditor | Multiple Collaborative |
| Proprietary code | Open source |
| Copyrighted content | Shared content |

From the above, the potentials of advanced technology to help improve secretarial practice has significance beyond very attractive legibility and readability of printed materials which are the products of the professional secretaries. Thus, Awojori (2006) reiterates that it is essential to take advantage of the features that advanced technologies offer and tap into secretary's natural affinity for these tools in order to create awareness that can expand their world view and enhance their skills. Specifically, the features are interconnectivity/interconnectedness, immediacy and interactivity communications. These are the very features that keep global business enterprises and business offices and workers and professional secretaries on the jobs.

Furthermore, technology has greatly affected secretarial practice not only in Nigeria but worldwide. Looking at the contributions of technologies to the profession, one begins to imagine what would have become of the profession if technology had not come to its rescue. Technology has completely enveloped secretarial profession such that it is now save to say that without technology there is no secretarial profession.

Bassi (2011) reiterates that technologies enthusiasts have long heralded the power of technology from the printing press to the laptop to transform several information communication technologies (ICT) around the globe. There is a high level of interest in harnessing advanced technology to help promote secretarial practice to the world standard. According to Fadare (2011) information communication technology has introduced different technological tools and equipment to assist the secretaries in carrying out their duties efficiently and effectively in many ways.

What Role has a Secretary got to Play in Moving Ahead in Technological Era?

The need for the re-engineering of secretarial practice is utmost and a triumphant move to secretarialship. This simply means that the introduction of the products of technology in the performance of secretarial functions such as advanced technological tools as highlighted above has replaced the crude office implements.

Carnegie (2011) maintains that office technology has thrown the traditional secretary into some dilemma and challenges. Today's secretarial functions deal with information management basically. Awojori (2006) affirmed that office technology is the collection of and distribution of information, communication (both internal and

external) and information processing through computers, electronic manipulation, storage and transmission of texts, numbers, sound and image.

Information is input, processed, stored, and output by a secretary through a computer and printer electrically, just the same way it is done manually. However, while files on paper in a traditional office become files in the memory of the computers hard disc, magnetic tape, and diskette. The plethora of a secretary's role in moving ahead advanced technologies are as follows:

1. Application of Principles of Smart Role

According to Carnegie (2011), the array of critiques in the literature and assessing the work in which the use of advanced technologies have been addressed reveal a set of guiding principles which the secretaries should deplore while operating advanced technological tools.

2. Identification of the Problem Role

The secretary should first identify the task that needs to be addressed and then assess which if any is the best technology to do the job. The secretary should start with the task and not the technology.

3. Added Value Role

If technology is to be deplored to address secretarial functions, the secretary should make sure that the technology will add value to other existing solutions.

4. Sustainability Role.

The secretary should consider carefully the full range of enabling conditions that are essential to implement an intervention which will last over a time. This includes factoring the ultimate relevance of the technology, access to appropriate technology and human resources capacity.

5. Multiple Uses Role

Where possible, the secretary should select a technology that can be used for multiple purposes. This will enable a greater number of individuals to benefit from and a variety of tasks to be deplored.

6. Reliability Role.

According to Slatedroid (2011), deploring advanced technology; the secretary must ensure that it is reliable and dependable to some extent that it cannot rapidly break down. Nothing slows down a task more than unresolved problems. Part of assessing the reliability of advanced technology includes making sure that associated and necessary elements such as access to regular supply of electricity or internet connectivity are available. He/she should ensure that he/she is adequately skilled and that maintenance personnel are on ground and that options to update or upgrade technology and others are in place

7. Ease of use role.

In secretarial practice, intervention of advanced technology should be easy to use. Perceived ease of use has in fact been cited as among the most important determining factors for technology uptake (Kenny, 2011). Excessive complicated technologies can present barriers to implementation and ultimate success of the intervention, especially if extensive training is required to learn how to operate that particular technology.

8. Training and Retraining Role

As indicated above, some data based application requires the use of advanced knowledge, skills and training to operate. The secretary should ensure that he/she is exposed to such training so that such technology is absolutely usable.

9. Computer training role

According to Ilesanmi (2012), it is paramount that the secretary must be comprehensively computer literate. Therefore, computer literacy should be emphasized and focused or intensified, so also, the lawful use of internet networks for appropriate information.

10. Visitor Management System Role via biometric

This is a Biometric based software developed to eliminate problems faced by manual ways of attending to visitors in any organization. According to Machonald (2002), biometric is the recording of things such as people's fingers' prints or the appearance of their eyes in order to identify them on an electronic system. It is also an automated method of recognizing a person based on physical logic or behavioural characteristics. Among the features measured are the face, finger prints, hands, geometry, handwriting, iris, retinal, vein and voice. Biometric technologies are part of extensive array of highly secured identification and personal verification solution.

Furthermore, biometric devices have vital uses in people management. The secretary can use them in restricting and granting access to vital data, documents as well as restriction to certain places in an organization. The devices have other uses, such as recording attendance rate and resumption time of staff, setting meeting reminders and appointments, using already stored data of each staff. The devices could also be used in appraisals, using a combination of the behavioural and physiological data recognition to measure individual efficiency.

11. Use of Social Networking Sites Role

Social networking sites such as “face-book” and “my space”, are fast catching on all over the world. Such networks have replicas in Nigeria. These sites allow each user to own a page which gives detailed information about the person. This revolution in communication serves as a means of knowledge sharing. These networks can also be used to recruit candidates for employment. Fadare (2011) says secretaries can paste job vacancies and advertisement on the sites to promote their organization's

opportunities with the aim of attracting the best talents.

Therefore, these networking sites are fast becoming recruitment portals with a massive database of job seekers. Based on statistics, at least seven out of every ten regular internet users is a member of one social networking site or the other. Additionally, if followed appropriately, the above enumerated roles can avoid many future problems; more importantly they can help leverage the power of advanced technology in enhancing secretarial practice, (I.E.O, 2010).

Conclusion

Technology has enriched secretarial jobs tremendously. This enrichment has resulted in job satisfaction for professional secretaries. A secretary now feels happy and satisfied when he poses behind a computer. In fact, the computer has become status symbol and has turned everybody in the world into secretarial staff.

Technology has eliminated waste of secretary's time by saving him of the time he spends on routine tasks, such as creating of file storage and retrieval of such files which are done by the computer. Also, the speed and accuracy with which documents are produced and dispersed are unmatched in the history of human skills.

Supporting the above, Komolafe (2009) asserts that the notion that the advanced technology will lead to unemployment or retrenchment of secretaries should be forgotten totally because technological tools cannot replace the creative, thinking, reasoning and dynamism of secretaries, but make office tasks and secretarial practices easier by replacing the more boring, repetitive routine and tedious parts of the secretarial jobs. In the same vein, Okechukwu (1999) affirms that in spite of the potentials of computer internet age and their efficiency, the role of a secretary would not be marginalized in management information, retrieval and utilization.

Recommendations

- i. All business educators should be technology literacy and should be conversant with the techniques of accessing them for both personal and academic use so as to produce graduates with relevant skills as well as keep abreast with technological dynamism and society needs.
- ii. Home-made technologies should be patronized so as to reduce foreign exchange and improve the local production of the technology.
- iii. Employers of secretaries should assess the prospective secretaries on the identified technological skills before engaging them so that they will not become round pegs in square holes.
- iv. Governments should provide adequate and regular supply of technological tools in all institutions of learning across the country.
- v. Tertiary educational institutions must continue to put pressure on government to invest more in technological tools. Additionally, there is need for institutions to investigate alternative and independent means of access to

information highway or internet for teaching, learning and research purposes through such means as satellite and microwave communications at lowest price possible (Ileladewa, 2011).

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