THE TRANSFORMATION AGENDA AND INCREASING ROLE OF SECRETARIAL PROFESSION IN NATION BUILDING: THE EXPECTATIONS.

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Introduction
I wish to thank the organizers of this conference for, not only choosing this conference theme, which to my mind is central to the expectations of the public, especially as it concerns office and information management, but also for inviting me to part-take in this all important occasion. I do hope and pray, as I believe that the communiqué that will emanate from the various sessions, of your deliberations would have far reaching effects in improving the service delivery of the secretarial professionals in a bid to contribute their quota in the task of nation building.

I wish to draw your attention however to the slight change or addition to the theme. It not mere brain-storm, it could otherwise rightly be construed as stressing the obvious. Please do pardon me for that.

In order to have good grasp or comprehension of the concern, scope and content, as well as its discourse structure, the remaining part, and indeed, the bulk of the presentation shall attempt to answer the following questions:

i. What is the Transformation Agenda all about?

ii. What are the traditional roles of the Secretarial Professionals before the introduction of the Agenda?

iii. What are the expected roles in the new dispensation, (as connoted in the Agenda)?

iv. What are the prospects and or prognosis (impacts on secretarial duties, personnel, and the Nigerian economy in general)?

The Transformation Agenda: Its relevance to the secretarial profession.

The Presidential transformation Agenda came in to being as a developmental policy document with the assumption of Mr. president, Mr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in office, on may 29, 2011, when the general feeling and ambition of government was to revolutionize the affairs of government and governance, drawing
inspiration from the famous Vision 20:2020. The major policy direction was to “…transform the Nigerian economy, to meet the future need of Nigerian citizens, with a view to diversifying with focus on “externally-based sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, solid minerals and Services…” Accordingly; the key areas emphasized by Mr. President in the Agenda is the encouragement of large-scale industrial manufactures and small and medium scale enterprises (SMES); revitalization of ailing industries, promotion of agriculture and agro-business, encouragement of local content manufacturing and the development of the Information, Communication, Technology (ICT) …” The direct specific relevance of the Agenda to the secretarial profession could be seen from the perspective of Information and Communication Technology. As if to say: “Information and Communication Technology is Secretarial Profession, and Secretarial Profession is Information and Communication Technology (ICT =SP; SP = ICT). The importance of ICT, was vividly captioned in the statement made by the Minister of Information Mr. Labaran Maku (2013), where he stated that “…it (ICT) remained pivot in the attainment of the nation's economic development agenda – Vision 20:2020…” It was also evident in the minister's speech that it was high time the country shifted from oil, to knowledge-based economy. This was equally reiterated by the Minister of National Planning, Shamshudeen Usman. No doubt, the creation of Ministry of Communication and Information Technology was meant to “…help tap the enormous ICT potentials that abound in the country for the overall benefit of the people …” What this implied is the increasing role of the Secretary and the Secretarial Profession was the phase of the increasing need to expand the national production frontiers in Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Services, among others.

The above, therefore meant that the Secretary, and the Secretarial Profession has gained more relevance or better put, has been accorded greater relevance in the current national economic drive, anchored on, or in which better performance, on one hand, and skills acquisition in the ICT becomes an issue of high or fundamental priority.

**What then is the new role of the Secretary and the Secretarial Profession in the phase of the Transformation Agenda?**

Before this question is answered, it is rational and logical, first to look at the traditional or what may be referred to as the evolutionary role of the Secretary. Given the various definitions of the terms Secretary and Secretarial Profession as presented by various authors (Encyclopedia Unabridged Dictionary of English Language, 1989; Shaw 1979; Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary; traditional duties of the Secretary were said to have been limited only to the following:

I. Initiating correspondence on all routine matters and drafting of letters  
ii. Handling and creating visitors and telephone calls;  
iii. Taking dictation and transcribing;  
iv. Arrangement for meetings and minutes preparations;  
v. Following up on correspondences, payments etc;
vi. Information generating;
vii. Preparation of itineraries and making travel arrangement;
viii. Serving as office hostess.

These were regarded as the traditional duties of secretarial profession in the past, before the coming of information technology. The Secretary was merely treated as “tea maker, and “note taker,” who only tendered rugged-old fashioned typewriters (Ezechukwu, 2002). However, when considered in the above traditional perspective, it becomes difficult to believe that the role of the Secretary or the Secretarial Professional could be seen or regarded as a reliable partner or stakeholder in the task of nation building, as the principles of the Transformation agenda dictates. This is because of the rapid change and expansion of the scope and content of secretarial duties as warranted by the inherent imperatives of Information Communication Technology (ICT) as the platform upon which the effective implementation of the New Transformation Agenda is anticipated. Therefore, in the current era of economic transformation, one could only view the role of the Secretarial Professional as not only increasing, but becoming more and more specialized. A role that would necessarily be performed under the dictates, and compliance to the tenants of ICT considered under this background, therefore, the question that readily comes to mind is:

What is the prognosis (Implication) of all these on the Secretary and the Secretarial Profession in the task of Nation Building?

The obvious implications of the dictates of the transformation Agenda which is also consonant with the requirements of information technology is that:

- The Secretary will need to align his/herself with the current demands of ICT in the performance of his/her role in rendering his/her quota to national development/nation building.

- The secretary will also require to acquire the necessary skills, that launch him/her unto the orbit of office automation systems, and towards aligning and adapting to the changing work environment, as Olojobi and Jiboku (2001) once observed, that the secretary, subsumed in the changing modern office situation, is “…faced with rapid changes in the work environment due to new technologies introduced into the office…“ The reason is that … certain secretarial skills are no longer suitable for the automated office.” Similarly, Ogomou (1997) observed that “the fast changes that have taken place in the office have brought significant changes on the secretarial job role. Ojukwu (2002), simply puts it that: “the Information Communication Technology phenomenon brings to question the relevance of secretarial studies”

- The Secretarial professional has, as a matter of urgent necessity to move away from the traditional “back room” function into a higher
profile “value-driven” function, a position that places him/her to lead, rather than simply react; be involved in formulating organizational strategies; “generically engineer” their own flexibility, and proactively anticipate changes and be ahead of regulation and business development, (Idogho, 2004)

- The secretary should shift from the traditional manual office methods and paper communication to electronic collaborated and communication networks (O’Brien, 1997);
- The Secretary should see himself as prospering or playing a catalytic role as dictated by ICT (Anyaduba, 1991).

All these imply that only a competent Secretarial Professional can find for himself relevance. It also implies that he has to make himself available and amenable to the changes that come with the rudiments of information technology. Moreover, since the transformation agenda is based on a set of priority policies and programmes which when implemented, is expected to transform the Nigerian economy, to meet the future needs of the people; and that the ICT has been identified to be the pivot in the attainment of this vision, then a Secretary who is versatile and possesses vast knowledge of ICT, would be regarded as a highly potential and resourceful stakeholder and contributor to the stake of Nigerian national economy (nation building).

What is left, at this juncture is to inquire, what could constitute challenges (in the phase) to the unfolding vision of the secretarial professional?

Response(s) to this, to my mind, should not be far-fetched. The following have been commonly and globally identified to be the likely challenges:

* One of the most glaring, and noticeable challenge is the lack of the necessary IT skills, in particular, “soft skills” such as communication, analysis, leadership, time management, team building, and presentation skills, (Idogbo 2009); as well as conceptual, people and technical skills (Obadailki, 2004).
* Next is lack of technical knowhow: Up till date, many Secretaries are yet to be completely computer literate, and this has made it possible or given room for non-professional Secretaries to compete with them on their job.
* There is also the challenge of resistance to change and negative attitude: Generally, people find it difficult to adapt to changes, and dozens of others secretaries find it difficult or reluctant to go for ICT training.
* Likewise, in any profession, including the secretarial profession, technical problem is often likely to occur in the process of making use of ICT equipment. The challenge of fixing or managing/maintaining the machines when they develop faults and this reduces time frame required to produce
* Obviously, there is no gain saying that the frequent and erratic power outage has become a recurrent decimal, and can affect enormously, the input of the Secretary, particularly, at times his job/skills dearly required at any specific point in time.

**Conclusion**

Finally, there is the need to end this presentation, by providing the following as recommendations, as constituting the way forward towards making the secretarial profession a prospective endeavour, and a Secretarial Professional a versatile, and vastly knowledgeable contributor to nation building:

i. The Secretarial Professionals should pick up the challenge of self development in computer-based skills  

ii. Secretaries should, as a matter of importance, enroll in short part-time courses, in computer science and maintenance.

iii. The new OTM (Office Technology and Management) curriculum is a giant step indeed in realizing the Profession properly and equally to force the needs of the day.

iv. Another veritable, non-formal way of facing the challenges ahead is for institutions to organize seminars, workshops and in house training for secretarial staff to enhance their performance, among others.

Thank you for listening.

**References**


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