SECRETARIAL PROFESSION AND THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF BUSINESS IN NIGERIA

OBUBA BESSIE E. (mcps)
Abia State Polytechnic, Aba, Abia State.

Abstract
The only constant thing on earth is change. Sometimes, change tends to affect the very foundation of certain phenomenon trying to give it a new face altogether. The Secretarial Profession is not an exception. Science and Technology has changed virtually everything including human behavioural pattern. Man and his business environment have been witnessing changes virtually in every sphere of life. Primitivisms are giving way to modernity in every business set up in order to maintain patronage. This trend poses great challenge to the Secretarial Profession if it must remain relevant to the present day realities. The language is ADAPTATION. This paper seeks to examine the changes in the business landscape in Nigeria especially as brought about by Science and Technology as well as its effects and challenges on the Secretarial Profession.

Keywords: Change, Adaptation, Secretarial profession

Introduction

There is apprehension in offices by secretaries as to what is their fate due to inventions and innovations in modern technology. The computer system has been introduced to do many things that are hitherto done by secretaries. A chief executive can sit in his office and schedule meetings, exchange business ideas, make flight and hotel reservations. He can manage information without the knowledge of the keyboard. To insert his information, he can use his pen to input his letter or document on the computer and with internet facilities and efficient server, he can send his mail store, edit retrieve and print his document.

However, the secretary's roles and business attributes still makes him relevant and someone to reckon with in the office and in any organization. The introduction of sophisticated office technological equipment like computers, word processors and other information technology resources coupled with new management techniques have completely changed old working habits and triggered off a new business orientation thus making moribund the old methods of business transaction. The use of new office machines is an innovation that poses great
challenge to Secretaries whose training is meant to make them experts in information keeping and retrieval.

**Who is a Secretary?**
The word Secretary has been defined variously by different authors and employers. Some definitions are: Onifade (2004) defined a Secretary as “An assistant to an executive, possessing mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, who displays initiative, exercises judgement and make decision within the scope of her authority” “A secretary as the principal administrative support position in the office who increases the efficiency and effectiveness of programmed staff by coordination the flow of paper in the office and carry out the day to day administrative support activities required to accomplish the work of the organization.” (http://www as state.ny.ns/tsplan/tsp).

Etymology said “ A secretary's main purpose is to bring food to meeting especially ice cream and hot chocolate. The term is derived from the Latin word 'secrē' which means to distinguish or to set apart the passive participle (secretum) meaning “have been set apart” with the eventual connotation of something private or confidential. A Secretarius was a person that oversaw business confidentially, usually for a powerful individual a king, pope etc (http://en. Wikipedia. Org/wiki/secretary.) “A secretary is either an administrative assistant in business office administration or a certain type of mid or high level governmental position such as a Secretary of State.

According to the new Webster's Dictionary of the English Language, International Edition, as a person responsible for dealing with correspondence and records of an organization or individual employers; secondly, the Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English defines the secretary as a person employed by another to help him in various ways; a secretary writes letters, makes appointments for those who wish to interview his employers; keeps records, etc and is often called a “Private” Secretary.

According to Elendu (2001) quoting International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP) a secretary is defined as “an assistant to an executive, possessing, mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, who displays initiatives, exercises judgement and makes decisions within the scope of her authority”. Elendu went on to say that the job classification of the Secretary is the most misunderstood in terms of office occupation. He said that some people for prestige regard their Typist as Secretaries. In the same vein, Stenographer is called a secretary by these people, hence neither the Typist nor the Stenographer is a secretary.

Secretaries are those who perform real secretarial duties; assistants or aids to
the executive. As a result of the training received by secretaries, they possess mastery of office skills; they discharge their duties unsupervised; they display initiative as a result of having good knowledge of the organizations where they work; they exercise judgment and takes decisions within the scope of their authority. These categories of Secretaries could be designated as: Private Secretary, Personal Assistant, Confidential Secretary and Executive Secretary.

**The Role of the Secretary in an Organization**

Hanna, Popham and Tilton (1973) said that even with the advanced technology used in offices today, there is yet to be found a substitution for the secretary. Secretaries are in high demand everywhere and in every type of business, be it government or philanthropic organizations. Secretarial positions are available in all cities and organization.

To say that the market for qualified secretaries will continue to grow is no exaggeration. It was their contention that even time of economic recession, secretarial position are available. They went on to say that in addition to availability, salaries for secretarial positions continued to be higher than clerical workers. The role of the professional secretary today has become increasingly more of assistant to management.

Today, secretaries' are being trained in the Polytechnics, Colleges of Technology and the Universities which have brought about higher degrees of ability than ever before. The professional secretary performs her duties for top level executive or for someone responsible for a major function in an organization. It is said that real secretaries' work requires high-level of performance. The secretary as defined by the IAAP performs the work within her areas of responsibility for only one individual (her boss). Hanna, Popham and Tilton (1973) quoting the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, state that a secretary is one who carries out the following activities.

- Performs general office work in relieving executives and other organization officers
- Taking dictation and transcribing it on the computer or word processor
- Makes appointments for the executive and reminds him of them
- Interviews people coming into the office, and directing the other workers those who do not warrant seeing the executive.
- Makes and answers telephone calls.
- Writing routine correspondences and handling personal and important mails.
- Keeping personal records and supervising other clerical officers and junior officers.

According to Luck (1981), the role of the secretary can further be elaborated as follows:
• Reading, sorting and organizing incoming mail;
• Compose letters and assist in preparing reports.
• Arrange for meetings and conferences
• Making sure that documents are properly filed for easy retrieval

The professional Secretary who finds herself in most industries and government do carry out her functions competently in assistance to the executives for the economic development in Nigeria. On a close examination of the role, she is an important member of the management team in business, industry, government, education, communication establishments and other areas of the economy. No Chief executive can function effectively in the absence of his secretary. The position of the secretary in any organization is such that her absence can mar the executive's day. As an important aid, the efficiency of the boss is tied to the efficiency of the secretary.

**Business Qualities of a Professional Secretary**
Harrison (1997) gave the following as the business attributes of a Secretary as (1) Secretarial skills, (2) Organizational skills, (3) Efficiency (4) Reliability (5) Responsibility (6) Discretion (7) Initiative (8) Tact (9) Diplomacy (10) Punctuality.

**The Changing Business Landscape**
According to Okute (2001), information Communication Technology is concerned with the aspect of managing and processing information through the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, protect, process, transmit and retrieve information. It is the handling and processing of information for use by means of electronic and communication gadgets such as computers, cameras telephones etc.

Atakpa (2010) stated that secretarial functions everywhere in the world have undergone a lot of technical changes. As a result, modern business office equipment which gives the secretary the opportunity to increase her efficiency abound. Many office functions and secretarial duties which were previously done manually have been mechanized. Thus the diversities of these office technologies require the secretary to possess new skills and sub-skills to enable him/her to be relevant in the changing business landscape as brought about by ICT.

ICT has changed the equipment and work group. of course: nobody today would like to work in an office where information processing and other secretarial activities are done manually or mechanically. So the mechanized office is gradually giving way to the automated office. Investment in networks of computer based workstations and other automated equipment has transformed traditional manual office method and paper communication media. This transformation has resulted in the development of automated system that relies on electronic collaboration and
communication networks, text processing, image processing and other information and communication technologies.

According to Okwuano and Obayi (2003), information communication technology has posed challenges to secretaries as communication in the present day office is done electronically. In the past, secretarial functions were performed manually such that documents and records were maintained on paper, stored in files and drawers. The consequences of global development in the modern information and communication technology area, calls for corresponding development of new skills in office communication by all secretaries and office managers.

In business today, information is a basic resource. We are living in a global information society, with a global economy that is increasingly dependent on the creation, management and distribution of information resources. People in many nations of the world no longer live in agricultural societies, composed primarily of farmers, or even industrial society, where a majority of the workforce consists of factory workers. Instead, the workforce in many nations consists primarily of workers in services occupations or knowledge workers, that is, people who spend most of their workday creating, using and distributing information, (O'Brien, 1996).

Today the information and Communication Technology revolution has dramatically changed all these and is moving quickly towards changing the work itself. The following are the modern ICT devices found in most business organization for secretarial functions. They are to the electronic computers with modern office accessories or packages and internet facilities for on-line communication and collaboration, computer printers, plotters, digit-memo, fax machines, photo-copier, Digital video camera, close circuit television, large-screen video projector etc. Similarly, the days of relying primarily on ICT professionals to meet our information processing needs are over. Today, secretarial staff is expected to use information they need to accomplish their job successfully. Net-worked microcomputers as professional workstations to acquire the information they need to accomplish their jobs successfully.

Modern Office Technology Skills needed by Secretaries

Traditionally, a professional secretary performs his normal office skills which take much physical and mental ability. The introduction of electronic equipments of various form in the offices has placed an uphill task to the secretaries working in the organization for effective service delivery. The areas of modern office technology are communication, telecommunication, reprography, and micrograph.

Communication: The equipment introduced under communication are:

Word processor: Word processing is the use of advanced hardware to manipulate words, sentences and paragraphs. The word processor is a type of
electric typewriter with storage and processing components. One of the major features of the word processor is that as the words are typed, they are displayed simultaneously on the VDU which enables the secretary to effect correction like deleting or inserting words, sentences and paragraphs before printing the documents (Agomuo, 2005). Word processors are programmed for automatic centring, line wrap around i.e. no carriage return and a variety of other features designed to increase a secretary’s efficiency. They can easily accommodate diverse tasks in a business environment. Word processors can design documents, fill forms, store information, retrieve information, print information. They add, delete, revise, rearrange, tabulate, justify margins etc. (Azuka, 2007) Nwosu (2002) observed that the word processing equipment may be divided into four basic categories: Standalone hardcopy, word processor, standalone display word processor, share logic word processor, and time shared services.

**Computers:** Oliver and Chapman (1993) defined a computer as a device that work under the control of stored programs, automatically accepting, storing and processing data to produce the information that is the result of the processing. The introduction of the computer has affected the works performed in the offices by the secretaries. It is difficult to find a standard office where there is no provision of computers. The computer is used for processing written communication by using various word processing software and hardware that are currently in use. Computers can be main computers, micro computers, main frame or super computers. Computers produces copies of work, scan image used for computer graphics working accounting information like the spread sheet Excel programme. The use of computers facilitates the use of the internet and organization of data using data base.

**Internet:** This is a worldwide system of communication network. Users of one computer in an environment permitted can gain access to information and provides accessibility to wide areas of information on various subject matter. The internet has turned the world into a global village with people from different nations and socio-cultural background can effectively communicate via the internet by exchanging their ideas, values and interests in an interactive manner. Chukwumezie, (2002) stated that the following skills are needed by the secretaries in other to manage information effectively via the net.

- Keyboarding skill and accuracy, Grammatical and Communication Skills, Computer fluency, Operating the telephone, Surfing the web, Browsing the net offline and online, Downloading and uploading the software.

**Database management:** The level of efficiency required in the production storage and retrieval of information in the required format in the information age has necessitated the need for database and database management competency. The term database refers to a collection of data organized for storage in a computer memory
and designed for easy access by authorized users (Agomuo, 2005). The essence of having a database is to meet the information needs of an organization. Using the database gives you the opportunity of adding information to already existing ones and helps to show relationship between the items in the different objects.

**Electronic Mail (E-mail):** This facilitates letters to be sent and received without using the post office. It is a form of information interchange where message are sent from one computer to another. The text to be sent is typed in one computer and then sent to another person on the network. The mail box is provided for every e-mail user.

**Electronic Commerce:** This is a modern technology that emphasize on the use of information technology as an important tool in carrying out business transactions. E-commerce involves the exchange of goods and services via the use of internet resources. It operates on the same principle as the traditional commerce which entails buyer and sellers coming together to exchange goods and services. Instead of the traditional method of physical presence to haggle, buying and selling are now done over networked computer.

**Teleconferencing:** This makes it possible for organization of meeting among geographically separated participants thus saving transport cost travelling risk and time as well as the logistics of scheduling a face to face meeting. Members also express themselves freely without fear (Salami, 2009). The communication system has enable managers of different bodies or organizations conduct meetings successfully while staying at different locations. This is because teleconferencing provides wider access to public meetings as well as widens the reaching of the public. The audio interaction makes the discussion to be lively and interesting.

**Video Conferencing:** This is a phase of electronic conferencing in which a number of users are simultaneously on line chatting and discussing. Video conferencing can be used to conduct meetings, seminars, workshops and other activities. In video conferencing, the meeting is conducted in rooms equipped with computers, television camera and receivers with the participants viewing themselves in a television screen. The mechanism involves transmission of graphics through cameras connected to computers in which the participants view themselves as they engaged in a discussion.

**Telecommunication**

**Telephone:** the telephone is one of the means of communication used within and outside the organization. The mode of use of telephone in an organization is determined by the size of the organization.
Facsimile (Fax) machine: This machine sends and receives documents and letters over telephone lines reproducing both text and pictures.

The cell-phone/global system for mobile communication (GSM): These are wireless phones with different shapes and sizes and they perform various functions. Cell phone has the advantage of the secretary carrying it about from one place to another.

Reprography: This is the process of producing many copies of original documents. The equipment varies in size depending on the volume of multiple copies to be made. Equipment under reprography is photocopies, cyclostyling/mimeograph machines and litho press.

Micrograph: entails the photographic reduction of images of text into slide stripes. Office documents can be assembled at the end of the year and reduced into slide stripes with the use of microfilm. This helps to save a lot of storage space in an organization. When the secretary wants to retrieve a particular information, he needs to indicate the day month and year of the document to view the information from the microfilm and to print the document when needed.

The secretary's fear of losing his/her job is allayed.

Organisations and secretaries are now working to ensure that secretaries are retained in their work stations. What are these efforts that are being employed to ensure that secretaries keep their jobs? Some of these efforts are highlighted below:

- Secretaries are continually retained in order to keep abreast of innovations in the office machines, organization, attitude and responsibilities.
- It is said that as office automation continue to evolve, retraining and continuing education will remain integral parts of secretarial jobs. Changes in the office environment have increased the demand for secretaries and administrative assistants who are adaptable and versatile.
- Secretaries are encouraged to tackle challenges through assignment of new responsibilities.
- Secretaries are motivated in order to accept changes in the office. They can see reasons for flexibility.
- Secretary's act as members of a team work and thus making them to participate in some decision making process.
- Secretaries are encouraged to use their initiatives in taking some decisions that are beneficial to the organization.
- Secretaries are encouraged to be financial and active members of professional organizations like NAPSSON.
Secretaries should attend workshops, seminars or conferences which may be self sponsored or organization sponsored.

Secretaries are encouraged to own a laptop or personal computer.

Organizations should provide computers which secretaries use for office work.

In order to ensure continued use of the computers, organizations should ensure steady power supply hence the need for generator in case of power failure.

Employers of labour look out for good customer services and interpersonal skills during employments, a well trained secretary should pose good human and public relations and communication skills.

There is no doubt that any secretary who works very hard who benefit from the opportunities provided for him through the programs stated above, cannot be afraid of losing his/her job. If an organization sacks him or her or refuses to promote him or her, he can easily get another organization. A secretary is very versatile. If an organization says 'No', another one will say 'Yes'. The “sky is the limit”.

Why is the Secretary indispensible in an Organization?

First and foremost, the secretary is indispensible in an organization because he is a very versatile human being. He is not like the other office gadgets or resources that do not have initiative that can only be manipulated by the secretary. He is the organization's image maker. He is the most important officer to be seen first and last by visitors to the organization.

Although the computer does many jobs hitherto done by the secretary, the computer cannot replace the secretary because of the following peculiarities of the secretary.

- It is the secretary that is trained to manipulate the computer and thus making it to function.
- The secretary is trained to receive visitors in a manner that neither the computer nor any other person can do.
- He knows how to keep secrets and confidential documents.
- She is the custodian of all office information and correspondence.
- She is in charge of the supplies of the organisation.
- He possesses good communication skills and thus making him/her good human and public relations.
- He keeps a good imprest account.
- He/she ensures an efficient and effective office by being current in records.
management and organizational ability.

- He organizes meetings making sure that preparation before the meeting is faultless and activities during the meeting are carried out properly and after the meeting things are put in order. He/she ensures accurate recording of minutes and prompt dissemination of the minutes.

- He is the acceptable assistant of the Chief executive since the chief executive cannot perform all the office functions despite his knowledge of the computer. He prepares light refreshment for the boss. He keeps his diary and constantly reminds him of his schedule. He prepares his antennary and makes flight and hotel reservations for the chief executive.

- Lastly, it is the secretary that other office workers look up to for solving office problems and who can help them with required information.

**Conclusion**

Secretaries perform various office functions in any organization they find themselves. The ability to apply some of these modern office technology leads to efficiency in the performance of their assigned roles and duties. Therefore, there is no gainsaying the fact that secretary is one single employee of any organization that is most important and needed. No matter the innovations or inventions brought about by the computer, the presence of the secretary (a human being) is needed for the computer to function.

The computer is only an instrument or tool in the hand of the secretary and it cannot replace the secretary. The Secretary will always be needed in the office. Although they may not be many as it used to be, they are still required and useful.

One thing the secretary needs in order to keep his job is retraining which can be done by attending classes or participating in online education for more knowledge on how to operate new office technology such as internet and teleconferencing computer facilities. As long as the secretary keeps abreast of challenges in modern technologies he will not be redundant or found wanting and he will always be relevant in today's changing business landscape as brought about by ICT.

The importance and the indispensability of the secretary in any organization cannot be overstressed even now that our offices are automated or what some people call “paperless office” which is the use of modern machines and methods in order to save such resources has reduced greatly.

The automation notwithstanding, secretaries are still indispensable for the attainment of organizational goals and objectives because of their roles and characteristics which are already highlighted in this paper.
Recommendations

Having examined the changing business landscape as it affects the secretarial profession, the following recommendations are made.

Organizations should endeavour to organize training and development programmes that will further enhance the effective performance of secretaries through acquisition of additional skills. Job training is the ultimate purpose to reach a level of productivity. Therefore, there is need for training and re-training of secretaries on ICT in order to achieve maximum output.

Secretaries should on their part be ready and open minded to acquire additional training and skill development, bearing in mind that changes occur frequently in the line of their chosen career and they should not be left behind in this digital age.

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