HARNESSING THE POWER OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) THROUGH SECRETARIAL PROFESSION

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Abstract
Secretarial profession has, in recent time, experienced some notable changes in tasks composition owing to trends and developments in the modern work environment brought about by technological development. It is against this background that this paper examined how the secretary can harness the power of technology using Information Communication Technology (ICT). Through literature review, the paper discussed the concept of the secretary, the concept of technology, the opportunities for the secretarial profession and the strategies for attracting and retaining secretaries for effective secretarial service delivery. It concluded that the role of the secretarial professional is germane and inevitable in the process of managing organization, hence, the need for secretaries to work hard through the application of appropriate ICT skills towards responding positively to the growth need of the profession.

Keywords: Secretary, Secretarial Profession, Harnessing, ICT

Introduction
Many professions abound all over the places for the benefit of humanity. All professions have career opportunities for those who embrace them. It is a known fact that some professions have more career opportunities than others. In the same way, some professions are more dignified and more demanding than others. It is a glaring fact that no two professions are the same. Each profession is separate, unique and apart from other professions.

Notwithstanding all these, it is to be noted that all professions are necessary for the survival of humanity and every country's economic development and transformation. All professions are complimentary to one another and no single profession could claim any superiority over other professions (Okoji, Babalola, and Fadare 2008).
What is a Profession?

A profession is defined by Michael (2007) as a job that requires special skills and qualifications, especially, one with high social status. It can also be a vocation, calling, especially one that involves some branches of learning or science. Thus, secretarial profession requires intensive training and retraining to acquire the perquisite qualifications for a profession.

Evolution of Secretarial Profession

The genesis of the secretarial profession is an area that generates a lot of controversies amongst authors, scholars and authorities. In all these controversies however, one thing stands clear: every author, authority and scholar has valid reasons for advancing the dates which the secretarial profession began. Thus, it is particularly difficult to fault any of these claims about the genesis of secretarial profession.

Adejumobi (2004) says that the secretarial profession came into existence in the 18th century during the industrial revolution era. He contends that Great Britain and United States of America played major roles in the introduction of secretarial profession. According to him, the two super powers saw to the early growth of the profession by inventing the typewriters as well as the art of writing shorthand.

In the same vein, Obara (2011) traces the evolution of secretarial profession to the period when Henry Mill in the year 1714 came up with the idea of a printing machine in preparation for the industrial revolution.

Without any prejudice to various authors' claims about the genesis of the secretarial profession, this writer is of the opinion that every profession in the world began after the creation of man in the Garden of Eden. This confirms that there could be no profession at all without man on the surface of the earth. Even then, the creation of heaven and earth by God, with man inhabiting the earth, would have been a mirage or an effort in futility.

Thus, the secretarial profession probably began with the creation of man. Okoji (2007) says that in the first meeting ever held in heaven, God told His business partners “let us create man in our own image”, (Holy Bible, 2007). He contends that those eight words spoken by God to the hosts of heaven were carefully recorded by the first secretary who covered the minutes of the meeting. Thus, since the creation of man, secretarial profession has been in existence. Famous kings, prophets and emperors who lived before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ all had professional secretaries who were then called scribes. These secretaries were engaged in recording the speeches of their bosses, covering all their meetings and recording all the events attended by their bosses. Since then, the secretarial profession has waded through stratified societal, technological man made and economic professional hazards, never passed through by any other profession. Today, the secretarial
profession has assumed a border, more changing, more trying, more sophisticated and more demanding dimension than it did in the past.

The Professional Secretary

Obara (2011) says the word 'secretary' was derived from Latin word “Secretarius”, meaning “something or informative known only to one or few people and kept secret or hidden from the view or knowledge of others”. From this meaning, it could be seen that a secretary is simply a preserver of secrets.

This is however a major function of a secretary and not the secretary himself. Thus, Obara (2011) sees a secretary as any person employed by another person, society or corporation, for the purpose of conducting correspondence, keeping business records and transacting other businesses.

In the same manner, Hornby (2005) describes a secretary as a person who works in an office, working for another person, dealing with letters and telephone calls, typing, keeping records, arranging meetings with people etc. This definition is a bit more realistic and more embracing than the first one. However, it is still deficient in content and in context. Inspite of this however, the words: “dealing with letters and correspondence” are basically talking of communication. And since the secretary is assigned with the duties of handling the correspondence, literary works and getting information, it only confirms that a professional secretary is daily involved with communication in the discharge of his/her duties.

In addition, Abiola (2002) opines that is a kind of all-purpose sentry, a diplomat, a psychologist, business lawyer, researcher, writer and shock absorber; having administrative ability to keep an office running smoothly; insight to assign priorities and judgment to know when to issue orders, conserve the boss time by screening telephone calls, visitors and mails, sensitive and current in human relations and alert to resolve misunderstanding. Of all the definitions given above, this last one is the most balanced; all embracing, adequate and most suitable.

The Concept of Technology

Much has been said and reported about the impact of technology, especially computers in education and administration. Much research has been conducted throughout the world to evaluate the positive effects of technology on learning, to investigate the kind of enhanced opportunities that technology provides in all fields of learning. In short, considerable resources have been invested to justify the place of technology in the field of knowledge and many research studies have revealed the benefits and gains that can be achieved by professional secretaries and administrators. Black, and Lynch, (2003) claim that technology will change the landscape of the world of business forever and as well as engender dramatic increases in the performance of secretarial functions.
The term 'technology' is coined from a Greek word 'technical', which means 'art' or 'craft'. According to Encyclopedia Britannica technology is the systematic study of techniques for making and doing things. Similarly, Aliyu (2002) says technology is the study, mastery and utilization of manufacturing and industrial methods, systems application of scientific knowledge to practical tasks in industry. Aliyu further asserts that technology refers to all the ways man applies his inventions and discoveries to satisfy his needs and desires.

**Secretary's Role in Harnessing Technology**

Over the past years, there has been dramatic shifts in the global economy. One shift has been from the manufacturing of goods to provision of services. Research at the Anderson School of management documents indicate this shift (Kamakar and Apet 2007). In every country of the world's 25 largest economies, services either account for more than 50% of the GNP or are the largest sector of the economy. But a more significant shift has been from an economy based on material goods and services to one based on information and knowledge.

According to Kamarkar and Apet (2007) by 1997 production of information products (such as computers, books, television, software) and the production of information services (financial services, broadcast service, education and administration) accounted for 63% of the world's output. Information services alone grew from 36 to 56% of the economy during that period. This is where secretarial services feature prominently.

The structure of organizations and the nature of works have changed tremendously. Organizations' structures have become flatter, decision making has become decentralized, information is widely shared across organizations and work arrangements are flexible. These shifts are often associated with increased productivity and innovativeness through technology (Meyer, 2007).

**Skills Enhanced by Technology**

A number of high profile efforts have been launched to identify the skills the professional secretary requires to succeed in the 21st century. Paramount among the skills is creating a vision of 21st century learning and to identify a set of 21st century skills. Built around core subjects, the skills include learning and innovation skills, information skills, technology skills, problem solving skills, enabling skills, adaptability skills and team work skills. These skills have been adopted by secretarial professionals in this country. More efforts have been focused on a more - specialized subject of crucial skills such as Information Communication and Technology (ICT) literacy or problem solving skills.
What is ICT?

According to Abosede (2010), the whole world is in the era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and it has greatly and positively affected the existence of man on earth. Similarly, Kombol (2006) asserts that the magical changes are quite glaring in every facet of our lives and touch the simplest of domestic services to corporate and limitless industrial applications. Information and Communication Technology is seen as a social leveler, which ranks second to death. It razes across cultural barriers, overwhelms economic inequalities, and even compensates for intellectual disparities. Technology can be the most potent democratizing tool ever devised. It then implies that those who do not bother about ICT do not bother about the future, and the future is where we are going to spend the rest of our lives. Hardly can anyone identify an aspect of life that has not experienced the impact of ICT (Pilat, 2004).

Information and Communication Technology is simply communication gadgets, equipment or facilities which improve and enhance the manner in which message is shared, relayed, disseminated, preserved and recalled for meaningful communication purposes (Kombol, 2006).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has predicated a revolution in secretarial profession with emphasis on approved methods and efficiency. Message transmission is no longer a tedious process, but it sped up consideration for the exigencies of time and space. In most cases, electronic mail has replaced letters in the post, (snail mail) faxes here outmoded telegrams, computers are more efficient than typewriters and traditional darkroom has been overtaken by digital photography; saving costs and hours. On the whole, ICTs are based on satellite connections as opposed to world “stranded in wires” and texts, vice or pictures are sent over a large distance in seconds (Kombol, 2006).

The emergence of ICT which brings modern office equipment has transformed not only the management functions but has impacted the secretarial duties. It has increased secretarial efficiency tremendously and has made accessibility of information easy for decision-making. It has made today's office look more sophisticated and a more interesting place to work. But it is sad to note that some secretaries still find themselves using the conventional method of carrying out their duties. This might not be far fetched from the stereotypical attitude of the secretaries, non-availability of ICT facilities, ill-competence of using the facilities among others.

As noted above a professional secretary who has acquired the basic secretarial training and skills of shorthand, keyboard and practical experience in the office work, to be able to cope adequately with some office jobs such as keyboarding of letters, filling, reception duties, keeping records, preparing itinerary, answering of telephone calls and so on. A professional secretary does not only handle the
typewriter/computer and writes shorthand but can also serve as an executive of an
organization. All the functions performed by the secretary reveal that her role in any
organization cannot be undermined; and this is why some people refer to secretaries
as the nerve-centre of any organization. Their belief is that secretaries are as
indispensable to any successful organization as blood is indispensable to any living
being on earth.

Harnessing ICT Skills by the Secretary

Some organizations define ICT literacy in very narrow terms as the skills
needed to operate hardware and software applications. Others define it more broadly.
Prominent among them is the international society for Technology in Education,
(ISTE: www.iste.org/), which has defined a set of standards that include technology
operation and concept. They position technology skills in the context of school
subject and a broader set of skills that include creativity and innovations,
communication and collaboration, research and information, fluency, critical
thinking, digital citizenship, technology operation and concepts.

Katz, (2007) assets that the above ICT skills have been adopted by
Professional Secretaries in United States and Nigerian Professional Secretaries are
expected to tap the ICT invaluable skills. Katz further stresses that ICT skills involve
ability to solve problems and think critically about information by using technology
and communication tools and information skills that include defining, assessing,
evaluating, managing, integrating, communicating information and creating new
knowledge. In the same manner, Ofcom (2008) sees ICT skills as a set of related
problem solving skills that include understanding the problem, characterizing the
problem, representing the problem, solving the problem, reflecting on the solution
and communicating to others. Thus, the professional secretary must be involved in
problem solving skills in terms of scientific inquiry skills of exploration and
synthesis as well as computer skills.

ICT Enabled Secretary Role's

Many prominent changes in organization structures and practices have been
enabled by the application of the power of technology through the use of ICT for
communication, information sharing, and simulation of business processes. Recent
studies of some organizations showed significant productivity gains associated with
specific ways that technology is being used by professional secretaries. According to
Pilat (2004) the greatest benefits of ICT to any organization are realized when ICT
investments are accompanied by organization changes such as new structures, new
business processes, new approach to office issues and practices and finally new
organization structures.

ICT Enabled Office Information System

In the entire universe today, office information technology is the 'in – thing'.
Gone were the days when secretaries worked with rickety manual typewriters manufactured during the days of Mungo Park. The days when major secretarial assignments were laboriously carried out have gone for good. Information technology has taken over and the entire daily office rituals have assumed a new dimension. Without mincing words, information technology has come to stay; at least, for now in our industries. The secretaries who still want to be relevant in the profession have moved and are still moving with the new trends in order not to be side-lined.

Okoji (2005) sees an office as any where (place, building environment etc) that is conducive, where work of clerical or secretarial in nature or involving papers, documents, or business materials or whatever other name it may be called are carried in by people, either employed your self-employed with a view to attaining organizational goals and objectives.

Information, according to Hornby (2005) is what is told or given news or knowledge. Similarly, Fadare (2004) sees information as the product, which results from processed or transformed data, where data is seen as a set of recorded events or facts. Thus, information can be seen as an account of recorded events or activity that carries some relevant meanings of the receiver(s).

**Secretary's Demand in Harnessing Information Technology**

The secretary in harnessing technology should develop new cognitive abilities that translate into key-skills for our transformed world of business (Devores, 2003). The cognitive skills include:

- The ability to process information very quickly.
- The ability to process information in parallel at the same time and from a range of different sources.
- The ability to determine what is not of relevance to the issue at hand.
- Familiarity with exploring information in the first instance through imagery and then use text to clarify, explain and explore.
- Display a relaxed approach to play- the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving is very important.
- Fluency with cross-functional affiliation. This means, operating in a group to achieve a goal, by using specialist and general common knowledge necessary for group operation(s).
- Illumination of attributes of human cognition, distributed intelligence and meaning what all the above represent are the ways in which professional secretaries are required increasingly to effectively operate and function in our highly digital world. Any computer literate professional secretary can narrate ample anecdotes of where a critical piece to office system can be assessed, sorted and process information, exploring possibilities to identify
problems solutions and collaborating with others (both live and synchronously) in order to achieve a goal.

**Harnessing New Skills Role**

The changes in organizations structures and business practices have resulted in corresponding changes in hiring secretarial professionals with competent skills needed in the industries. Computerization of the work place has raised demand for problem-solving and communication tasks such as responding to discrepancies, improving production process and coordinating and managing the activities of others. The next effect is that companies hire or employ secretaries with higher skill set.

In the 21st century economy and the society, the memorization of facts and implementation of simple procedures is less important. The ability to respond flexibly to complex problems, to communicate effectively, to manage information, to work in terms, to use technology and practice and produce new knowledge is crucial [Lisbon Council, 2007].

**Wide Spread Access to ICT**

Access to ICT is spreading widely across the business and office activities worldwide and is affecting the everyday lives of people. According to 2005 World Bank figures, a majority of households in most of the world largest economies have immediate access to televisions, cell phones, and the Internet. The modern professional secretary must have unlimited access to ICT.

**Use of New Patterns of Information Role**

The pervasiveness of ICT has changed the way secretaries access information as well as the way they use information and create new knowledge. Secretaries use the internet to find new job opportunities, look for mates, stay in touch with relatives, do shopping, book flights for their bosses, run for office, solicit donations, share photos and post videos.

Similarly, professional secretaries use ICT through the internet regularly to conduct online purchases, use online chats in messaging and download relevant information or documents, play games, exchange email, conduct banking transactions and search for new information.

Furthermore, professional secretaries can now turn to the Internet to find answers to common problems about health, taxes, job training, and government services (Fallows 2008). Many offices now use the Internet to access multimedia materials and to create digital content.
Uniqueness Role of the Internet through ICT

The Internet is a variable element of the ICT. The element is particularly unique in the way and manner it operates and reduces the entire world to just a village. Almost every activity of human beings can be found and done through the Internet. Communication, research, acquiring and giving out knowledge, business transactions, payments, and so on can take place via the Internet. It is the latest and profound in the world of Information Communication Technology [Onyekonwe, 2010].

Similarly, Wilscox, (2006) while discussing the Internet and other new technology says:

Internet users exchange message round the world electrically. They surf the Internet, tapping the masses of information and entertainment that the interlocking systems of computer network offer, virtually unconstrained by time and space. Through the Internet World Wide Web, thousands of companies, organizations and individuals tell the world about themselves.

In the same vein, Ademiluyi (2007) collaborates the above by saying that the internet revolution has not only brought awareness to secretarial professionals but has also explained their performance potentials. He describes its advantages as follows:

The website is like a storehouse knowledge which when opened reveals unlimited access to information on everything in the universe. It is said that the level of information one can obtain via Internet is only limited to the imagination of those accessing it.

To access the inexhaustible warehouse of knowledge, a secretary needs a telephone line and a personal computer. The secretary sits back at his house or office, connects his telephone line to a computer and clicks into the network of an internet service provider to access the worldwide web (www).

Conclusion

Although, Information Communication Technology (ICT) provides lot of benefits to secretarial professionals in Nigeria, there are lots of gray areas which need mention. The Internet affords the influx of untrained secretaries, digital photography and software makes deception possible via manipulation of photographs, the multiplicity sources of information make plagiarism an easy route for the lazy
educationist, while online journals and textbooks pull down the sales figures of hard copies.

Also, ICT makes deception easy, thus, the unethical secretarial professionals might use it for ulterior motives. These search lights on ethics that professionalism requires in secretoryship.

Furthermore, ICT are volatile. Computer software can crash, losing vast amount of memory, mobile phones are easily damaged by water and computer viruses can cause malfunctions, and corrupts files containing vital information.

**Recommendations**

Professional secretaries must realize that the previous training they had is no longer sufficient in the new dispensation. Thus, they need to be sent for ICT training to sharpen their skills in ICT use because old methods and skills of performing secretarial duties are no longer relevant. Practically oriented ICT must be included in the curricula of institutions training secretaries and administrators.

Government must remove import duties on ICT imports and grant tax holidays to ICT businesses to enable secretarial professionals stand on sound footing.

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