SECRETARIAL PROFESSION IN TODAY'S ADVANCED TECHNOLOGICAL ERA

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Abstract
Technology is advancing every day. The conventional techniques in Information Communication and Technology are no longer adequate for exchange of information. Secretaries should be conscious and apply these changes to today's lifestyles. Academic qualification, office equipment and personal attributes of traditional secretary form the basis for today's advancement in technology. It is on this note that this paper try to examine secretarial profession and the trend in Information communication and Technology and thus recommends the advantages of Information communication and Technology to secretarial profession of the third millennium.

Key words: Secretary, Technological era, Profession, Third millennium

Introduction
The introduction of sophisticated office technology equipment like computers, word processors and other information technology resources coupled with new management techniques have completely changes old work habits in the office and triggered off a new business orientation thus making moribund the older methods of business transaction (Nwaokwa and Okoli, 2012).

Okute (2001), sees Information and 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, telephone and so on.

Atakpa (2010) stated that secretarial functions everywhere in the world have undergone a lot of technical changes. As a result, modern 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 modern office.
Effective flow of information allows secretaries to function, to coordinate their parts and respond to new challenges. Technology is power, especially in this information age, where advancement of vocational and technical education which secretarial profession belongs is used as one of the yardsticks that determine the strength of a nation.

The Obasanjo regime liberalized the telecommunication sector with opportunities for modern secretaries to participate in the global economy (Titiloye and Titiloye, 2008). Before this time, telephone was initially meant for voice contact only. Today, a letter, a book, picture or any processed document can be transmitted by the computer over the telecommunication network.

The new communication system emerges as a result of the marriage between computers and telecommunications. This implies that when two or more computers are connected on the telephone network, stored information in each computer can be transmitted in a matter of seconds to other users in any part of the world. This has drastically changed the methods, techniques and speed of exchange of information. Secretary in this third millennium must be versed in computer skill, networking, satellite technology and data communication to enable him/her function effectively.

**Nature of ICT to Secretarial Profession in Today's Advanced Technological Era**

ICT has changed the office environment in which secretaries operate. Technological advancement has dramatically advanced the communication process beyond the traditional memo, letter, telephone that people are used to. In the information society where progress and power depend on adequate and timely information and knowledge, secretarial roles become more critical.

Essien (2006) opines that twenty years ago, most people could expect to go through life without having to deal with computer and other ICT gadgets. Nowadays, however, it is becoming increasingly difficult for anybody, especially secretaries to escape the computer influence. These modern devices permit information to be transferred worldwide on a massive scale by satellite data transmission, video conferencing, electronic mail, internet and personal computers among others.

**Challenges of ICT to Secretarial Profession**

Technology has changed the world's economy from a stable manufacturing dominated entity to a high-tech service and communication oriented one. This change is making competent secretaries more of assets than liabilities. The change is also making training facilities in tertiary institutions obsolete within a very short time. In a modern office today, the use of the manual typewriter has become old fashioned; unfortunately, it is this equipment, among other related ones, that many of our training institution use to train secretaries (Titiloye and Titiloye, 2008)
Coming into the work place today are new generation of secretaries with value systems and expectations about work that differ from those of the previous generations. Most organizations today cannot thrive without functional, effective, proficient and digitally compliant professional secretaries. A poorly trained secretary in this era would constitute a great threat to the idea of accurate, adequate and timely dissemination of information. This means that many of the secretaries trained on yesteryears equipment that are not ICT oriented will soon find out that they are obsolete and irrelevant in the today's technological advancement era.

The Third Traditional Secretary versus Third Millennium Secretary
The traditional secretary differs from the millennium secretary; however, secretary has always been an indispensable human resource for the chief executive. The secretary is a subordinate who assists his/her boss. The traditional secretary is one who existed in the first and second millennium (Onifade, 2009).

Characteristics of the Traditional Secretary
The traditional secretary attended roadside institute and his basic entry qualifications are primary school certificate, secondary modern school certificate and secondary/grammar school fourth year certificate (G4). At the end of his/her training, he/she wrote the Pitman or Royal Society of Arts (RSA) examination in shorthand and knew how to type and learn all the secretarial duties, the English language, bookkeeping, office practice and so on. The examinations are given in three stages: stage I (ordinary level), stage II (intermediate level), and stage III (advanced level). He/she possess high-level shorthand and typewriting skills. To be efficient in the office he/she was expected to write 100-120 words per minute in shorthand and type between 50-60 words per minute. He commonly used office machines, such as addressing, duplication, dictating, billing adding, and calculating machines. He had to be adept in filling system and have very good human and public relation skills (Onifade, 2009).

Some of the machines that the traditional secretaries used were typewriters (manual, electric, electronic), franking machines, Dictaphone, dictating and stenographic machines etc. The office of the traditional secretary was closed, decentralized and partitioned. To aid in filing and indexing, wooden and steel cabinet were used for keeping visible card records, visible loose-leaf records, rotary indexing equipment, strip indexing equipment and line reference equipment. Stencils and master sheets were prepared for ink-and-spirit duplicators and a scanning machine was also used for duplicating process. The office hazards were not pronounced, but the common one were from a scissors, knife and razor because many things were place on the wooden shelf and would sometime fall and wound the secretary.

The type of nomenclature in vogue in those days included typist, stenographer and secretary, all with distinct description. They were generalist secretaries, not specialist
Secretaries, and their jobs were routine in nature. The qualities and the responsibilities of the traditional secretary are described in the acronym “SECRETARY” by Ogbenchie: “S” for Secretive, “E” for Educated, “C” for Courteous, “R” for Reliable, “T” for Tactful, “A” for Accommodating, “R” for Responsible and “Y” for Yielding. He used plenty of paper for correspondence, duplication and forms (Onifade, 2009).

### Characteristics of Third Millennium Secretary

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/her academic qualifications, acquisition of skills, the environment, roles and responsibilities, office hazards and nomenclature.

The secretaries today got to tertiary institution (polytechnic 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, and information and communication technology. For small organizations, secondary school graduate with basic skills may be employable. 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/she must be adept on the computer in word processing, spreadsheets, CorelDraw and desktop publishing. He/she must also acquire good communication skills and must possess human and public relations skills.

The secretary office has moved from closed to open. Although we still have closed offices, we have more that are open. The open offices have more advantage 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, and there is less paper usage. The secretary is an assistant to a manager. He plays supportive roles; however, the third millennium secretary's role has increased. Apart from the traditional responsibilities, such as typing, taking dictation and transcribing, managing records, receiving, storing and retrieving information or operating the computer, attending meetings, answering telephone calls, he now carries out research, prepares the manager's itinerary, makes travel bookings and hotel reservation, supervises the junior workers and makes some decisions using his initiatives. He should be able to answer some questions on behalf of the boss. For example, a client who wants the price of a product should not wait to see the boss (Onifade, 2009).

The office today has changed, just as we have new innovations and invention in technology. It is common to hear many Nigerian companies, especially banks, talking about “re-engineering.” Most office hazard is air pollution. Because of the use of air conditioners in offices, there is no adequate ventilation. Another hazard that the invention of new technology brought, especially the computer terminals, is eyestrain.
Backache, neck pains, stomach aches, cataracts, stress and high blood pressure are all associated with the use of video display terminals (VDTs) used in offices. 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, bilingual secretary etc. The millennium secretaries are now specialized and their new titles show their areas of specialization (Onifade, 2009).

Specific Areas of Changes in Today's Technological Era as it affect Secretarial Profession

The technological dynamism that characterizes our world today has permeated every facet of office work; virtually everything is done differently compared to the past years. Every activity in the office has a touch of the technological “wide fire” that has turned almost everything around. The basic functions of every office which include: receiving, giving out, processing, recording, arranging, storing and retrieving of information including the supervision of cash flow and attending to routine administrative matters are done differently today. The office which was formally referred to as a place where paper work is done gradually becoming a paperless office/electronic office. The followings are some major office activities that have been affected positively by the technological changes as identified by Nna (2012):

- Communication: Because of the use of telephone, mobile and “land lines” facsimile machine, e-mails and internet, communication has become more effective, fast and easy. A new technology called telecommunicating has emerged. It allows some employees connect with their office network from their personal computers and perform their job in the office from home, without necessarily showing up in the office.
- Records management: This involves filing, storing, preservation and retrieval, and disposal of documents. These are routine tasks in every office which are done differently now. Instead of the traditional cabinet, shelves and cupboards, records are kept using electronic systems in modern offices.
- Administration: Administrative activities have been made easy and fast because any information needed for decision making are available almost immediately. A file can be transferred from one office, department, branch, state and even country to another in split seconds and decisions that need to be reached are taken care of without delay.
- Advertisement: This is better done in modern times via mobile phones, the internet and mass media. This is unlike posters, and banners that limit your advert to only a few people within the area of operation.
- Public relation and customer care services: This can now be done with ease as customers can be reached anytime via communication gadgets.
- Document creation: The quality and design of documents created in offices today are wonderful unlike the days when manual typewriters were used.
sophisticated design and style can be on documents as the machine was very limited in functions.

- **Sales and purchases:** Sales and purchases are done with ease because right at your desk in the office you can make enquiry about products, have opportunity to see product you intend to buy on your computer system, make choices of what you want and order for the product which would be delivered to you almost immediately.

- **Meetings, seminars and workshops:** These are normal activities in business organization. They are necessary as they contribute immensely to the growth and development of organization. Seminars and workshops are now held in rooms well equipped with modern Information and Communication gadgets like computers to enable the use of PowerPoint for presentations, projectors, microphones, tape recorder etc. A new technology is being used today called teleconferencing. Teleconferencing is a process of holding a meeting/conference through telecommunication. In some companies this technology has almost replaced physical meeting. A good example of this technology in Nigeria is MTN e-presence.

- **Video Conferencing:** This facility usually makes use of the internet with or without the telephone and allows visual and speech communication among several people at the same time. Like teleconferencing, it enhances remote communication. For example, your colleague in America can remotely participate in a meeting held in Nigeria whereby he sees and hears everybody who attends the meeting in Nigeria as he makes his own contribution.

- **Scanner:** This machine is used to convert hard copy documents into soft copies to later be transmitted from one place to the other via internet. This format can include colours, unlike the typical fax machine.

- **Printers and Photocopier:** Printers are used to convert our document from soft copy formats to hard copies and photocopiers are used to make additional copies of such documents

**Conclusion**
The role of ICT cannot be ignored in the efficient and effective performance of today's secretaries. Technology has provided and opened a lot of ways by which secretaries can perform various office functions with greater ease and speed. It enables secretaries to interact with other colleagues elsewhere without necessarily leaving their own domain. It has entirely changed the way office duties and functions are performed. It eliminates deterioration which characterized paper office, it serves as a permanent residual quarters for information where they can be contacted easily in their perfect state of being as at when needed for communicating.

Therefore, secretaries must adapt to changes in the world of work to remain relevant, this will enable them to find it easier to compete in the world of business and fit in as
third millennium secretaries.

**Recommendation**

In order to ensure secretaries perform their office functions and secretarial duties efficiently and effectively as third millennium secretaries, the following recommendations are made:

- Secretaries should consistently embark on technological training courses, seminars, workshops in order to keep in space with technologically changing world.
- Secretarial training institution such as schools, polytechnics, colleges of education, universities should be provided with necessary support and adequate ICT machines and devices with which to train and prepare secretaries for the world of work in the process of teaching and learning.
- Secretaries should always be ready and open minded to acquire additional training/skills development, bearing in mind that changes occur frequently in the line of their chosen career and they are not left behind in the use of ICT in this digital age.

**References**


