THE CHALLENGES OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES ON SECRETARIAL PROFESSION

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Abstract
The challenges faced by a secretary or a professional secretary as a result of the advent of new technology are very challenging with the uniqueness of her profession. The secretary is an assistant to an executive and is trained to type and performs many office duties. She possesses personal and business qualities and guards her professional ethics of confidentiality. But today the gradual shift towards new technologies in the office threatens her job. Many executives think they can use the computer themselves and thus, they don’t need the secretary. This is so because the modern laptop does not require the executives to know keyboarding because they can talk to or write on the screen and everything would be typed. He can employ internet teleconferencing facilities for meetings. All these notwithstanding, the secretary is indispensable. This is because the executive needs an assistant who invariably must be the secretary who is trained in receiving visitors, answering and making telephone calls when the executive is busy with very important engagements.

This paper reveals that secretarial professionals remain relevant in the areas of document preparation, office administration, human relations and executive assistance where the new technology cannot rule.

Key words: Challenge, New Technology, Indispensable, Secretarial profession

Introduction
The introduction of new technology has provoked real questions as to whether secretarial professionals are still needed in the office environment. Many people are of the opinion that since virtually everybody is now computer-literate and are able to perform the basic secretarial functions, such as typing and printing of document from computer without the input of secretarial professionals, there is not much for them in an office environment. In some offices here in Nigeria, the secretarial cadre is being technically phased out on the ground that every worker should be able to perform the secretarial task. Infact, in some organizations, they don’t replace any secretary that retires or dies while on the job neither do they even advertise the secretarial cadre because of the aforementioned. Why is this so? The reason is due to the inventions and innovations in modern technologies where the computer has been invented to do many things that are hitherto done by the secretary. A chief executive can stay in his office or room to book flight and hotel reservations. He does not need any knowledge of keyboard to input his
information. He can now use a pen to input his letter or document on the computer. With an internet facility and with efficient server he can send his mail and receive reply, can store, edit, retrieve and print his information without stress.

However, the secretary’s roles and personal qualities still make her a force to reckon with in the office and in the organization. This study therefore, focuses on the concept of the secretary and technology, the personal, business and duties of secretaries, the effect of new technology on secretarial profession and why the secretary will remain a force to be reckoned with and an indispensable and non-negotiable personality which will continue to be relevant in any organization even in the age of modern technology.

The Concept of Secretary and Secretarial Profession
The word, “Secretary” has been defined variously by different authors and employers. Some people refer to the secretary as a typist, others refer to her as a part of the clerical team in an office, some other people see secretary as a receptionist and some the ‘‘mind’’ of the boss.

Etymologically, “a secretary’s main purpose is to; bring food to meetings, especially ice cream and hot chocolate. The term is derived from the Latin word “Secernere” meaning “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, therefore, overseeing business confidentially, usually for a powerful individual (a king, pope, etc.). (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/secretary).

Ugiagbe (2002) defined a secretary as an assistant to an executive, possessing an impressive mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, who displays initiative, exercises judgment, and makes decisions within the scope of his/her authority.

Boladele (2002) expressed that a secretary is a warm, endlessly helpful and understanding individual whose sole aim is to alleviate, solve, prevent or soften problem workload and upsets for his/her executive. He/she is the means by which the executive initiates, handles and completes a project.

However, the Professional Secretaries International (PSI) defines a secretary as an executive assistant: who has mastery of office skills, demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, exercises initiative and judgment and makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority.

Generally, a professional secretary coordinates the daily routines of an office and organizes the office schedules and paper work. A secretary’s duties require analysis of the situation, judgment, technical knowledge and creativity. The number and type of
activities secretaries are assigned to depend on whether they are generalists (multifunctional secretaries) or specialists (such as legal or word processing secretaries). Secretaries use many different talents and work with many different people. Modern professional secretaries are now referred to as office managers by some people because of their activities, education, skill acquisition, knowledge and even expectations from their bosses, customers, clients and the general public.

Whether called a secretary, a manager or a personal assistant, a professional secretary is no more the man or woman sitting behind the typewriter, taking shorthand dictations and attending to visitors only. Office management is now more concerned with office occupations or the exhibition or use of skills, aptitudes, attitudes and knowledge for carrying out successfully the functions of the office (Ohakwe, 2001).

**Personal, Business Qualities and Duties of a Secretary**

Having discussed who a secretary is, it is imperative to state the personal, business qualities and duties of a secretary. These include – confidentiality (ability to keep secrets, secrets), assistance or support or help, professional code of ethics, typing skill and communication skill. A secretary should be able to keep secrets of the organization and that of her boss. Her role is principally that of support, assistance or help. She carries out activities assigned to him by his executive or takes initiative which is within his authority and responsibility. A secretary is a professional who has a code of ethics which must be adhered to jealously. She is dynamic and versatile because she works in an environment that is not static. She should be ready to accept change and challenges of the office and the world of work. Her title changes in conformity with her responsibilities. Today, the computer’s functions has changed and so she can now talk or use pen to write on the computer without the use of the keyboard. What an amazing innovation in the world of modern office technology! The secretary interacts with people and has the first contact with the visitors to the organisation. She operates the telephone for the organisation and her boss, her communication skill, human and public relations skill is excellent. Her general appearance is also superb. http://www.secretarialsite.com/secretarial_ethics.htm

Lauria (1972) highlighted the following as the personal attributes of a secretary. She has to be adaptable, level headed, good observant, intuitive, flexible, tactful, friendly, accurate, thorough, thoughtful, initiative, self-confident, good listener, a good interpersonal skills and a good appearance. Harrison (1979) gave the business attributes of a secretary as secretarial skills, organising skills, efficiency, reliability, responsibility, discretion, initiative, tact, diplomacy, and punctuality.

The professionalism attached to the personal and business attribute of a secretary is the professional code of ethics. The ethics of a secretary and office professional are moral
principles relating to the job that she will be bound by. These ethics include confidentiality, honesty, loyalty, reliability, responsibility, work unsupervised (meet deadlines, set priorities), cooperativeness, flexibility, multi-skilling (learn as much as possible about computer program and other positions in the firm), and bribery (do not be tempted to accept gifts or favours from internal or external clients just in case there is an underlying reason). A secretary is very versatile. If an organisation says “No” another one will say “Yes”. The “sky is the limit.” (Onifade, 2010)

**History of Secretarial Profession**

Buseni (2013) stated that literature on the history of the secretarial profession shows that nobody knows when secretaries originated, but that the Romans were first to employ men till the late 1880s. However, in the 1930s, women started to dominate the profession. In Nigeria, there were few secretaries in the early 1900’s because there were no government established training institutions. Organizations employed typists and stenographers as secretaries. These “secretaries” trained in road-side secretarial institutes. These institutes did not have qualified instructors and adequate machines. Therefore, those who employed them were skeptical about their administrative competence, thus limiting their activities to routine or chore office jobs.

In the late 1900’s, the state and federal governments started recognizing the need to employ efficient secretaries and established Federal Training Centres in Lagos and Kaduna. The state governments later established Staff Development Centres. Admission requirements into these centres were low. Later, polytechnics were established by both state and federal governments in order to have better trained secretaries. At present, we have a few universities with a Secretarial Administration department where secretaries are trained. The polytechnics are still regarded as the best place to train secretaries. Secretaries command high respect and they easily get jobs. They are versatile because all organizations need them. In the early days of producing secretaries in Nigeria, people regarded those who went to commercial secondary modern or commercial secondary schools as dullards. The public regarded those who went to secondary grammar schools as highly intelligent - those who would become doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. Things have interestingly reversed as commercial or business courses are becoming more versatile than the science courses. We now find doctors and other professionals who write accounting examinations.

**The Concept of Technology and New Technology**

According to Eduviere (2005), technology is the technical means people use to improve and make their lives and surroundings easier and better. It is also described as the knowledge of using tools and machines to do tasks efficiently.
Joseph Chukwudi Nwazor (2014) cited Harmony (2000) and defined technology as the systematic application of science or an organized knowledge to practical tasks.

However, technology as used in business and in education is an application of scientific knowledge and tools to solve practical problems (Arolasafe, 2006 as cited in Joseph Chukwudi Nwazor, 2014). It takes the form of information technology whereby facts or details about something (information) are transmitted by various methods to solve varieties of problem.

Meanwhile, new technology can be defined as any set of productive techniques which offers a significant improvement (whether measured in terms of increased output or savings in costs) over the established technology for a given process in a specific historical context. Defined thus, what is seen as “new” is obviously subject to continual redefinition, as successive changes in technology are undertaken.

Threats and Challenges of New Technology on Secretarial Profession

Onifade (2010) confirmed that there is no doubt that these modern technologies have thrown some secretaries out of job and the trend will continue for some time. The innovations and inventions in computer and its facilities have made the office to reduce the number of secretaries. The jobs which the secretaries perform in the office and the errands they run have been taken over by the computer. The functions of the computer and its facilities which aided the reduction in the number of secretaries needed in the office as spelt out by Onifade (2010) are:

1. Information which is the most important ingredient of the office can be stored, processed and retrieved by the computer facilities.
2. It can be used to produce fast and accurate information.
3. It provides very cheap services.
4. Messages can be sent to many people simultaneously with the use of computer’s internet.
5. Security of information is assured.
6. Time, effort and money are saved.
7. Stress is minimized.
8. You can purchase office items online.
9. You can book airline tickets and hotels online.
10. Space is saved as little or no paper is used in the office.

The most recently manufactured laptops accept voice whereby you talk; your message is typed without having any need to use the computer’s keyboard. In the same vein, this computer accepts handwriting whereby you can write with a particular pen and all that
you write is typed on the screen ready for editing and printing. An executive who does not know how to type may use either his voice or pen to produce his document. An office that has two or more secretaries can afford to sack one of them and keep just one of them. Looking at these functions, the secretary is not mandated to go to the airport to book flight for his/her boss. Many jobs which were hitherto performed by the secretary are now performed by the computer but with the help of the secretary herself or an operator – computer, left alone cannot do this.

Technological changes have tremendously transformed the traditional role of secretaries in offices. The traditional roles which involve typewriting and taking shorthand dictation, answering of telephone calls and processing of mails have been greatly revolutionized. In recent times, modern secretaries are exposed to high technology such as the internet which simplifies duties and enhance knowledge and the performance of the secretaries.

According to Adebayo and Akinyele (2012), these technologies make it easier to send messages by fax, telex and electronic mails and boost the morale of secretary in the following ways:

- The secretaries have access to, and are able to manipulate information; hence they are becoming more powerful. Secretaries are more proactive with new roles and responsibilities.
- It also enables the secretaries to exhibit more positive attitudes toward new office technology and welcome the changes. The secretaries are able to communicate with all levels of employees.
- Encourages extensive personal interactions as secretaries not only prefer personal contacts but finding the technology becomes a means of making this happen.

The Secretary: A Force to be reckoned with and an Indispensable Personality

The secretary is a force to be reckoned with and an indispensable personality in any organization. Her worth is not negotiable because she is a very versatile human being. She is a human being unlike the other office ingredients or resources that do not have initiative that can only be manipulated by the secretary. She is the organization’s image maker. She is the most important officer tube seen first and last by visitors to the organization (Onifade, 2010).

Although the computer does many jobs hitherto done by the secretary, yet the computer cannot replace the secretary because of the following peculiarities listed by Onifade (2010).

1. It is the secretary that is trained to manipulate the computer and thus making it to function.
2. The secretary is trained to receive visitors in manner that neither the computer nor any other person can do.
3. She knows how to keep secrets and confidential documents.
4. She is the custodian of office information and correspondence.
5. She possesses good communication skills and thus making her good in human and public relations.
6. She keeps a good imprest account.
7. She ensures an efficient and effective office by being current in records management and organizational ability.
8. She 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. She ensures accurate recording of minutes and prompt dissemination of the minutes.
9. She is the acceptable assistant of the chief executive since the chief executive cannot perform all the office functions despite his knowledge of the computer. She prepares light refreshment for the boss. She keeps his diary and constantly reminds him of his schedule.
10. It is the secretary that other office workers look up to as problem solver in the office and somebody who can help them with required information.

Conclusion
In conclusion, there is no gainsaying to the fact that the secretary is the gateway and the life wire of any organization and she will always be needed to render assistance in one way or the other. No matter the innovation or invention brought about by the computer, the presence of the secretary (a human being) is needed for the computer to function. The secretary is a subordinate and an assistant that is needed by the chief executive for making telephone calls and receiving telephone calls. He is the only person trained in the efficient and the effective management of information, office correspondence and human resource for the benefit of the organization and in attaining the organization’s objectives.

The computer is only an instrument or tool in the hand of the secretary and it cannot replace the secretary. The advent of computer has only come to enhance and bring effectiveness to the job of the secretary in terms of accuracy, storage of documents, replication of job without stress, less of fatigue incurred, neatness of job and so on. The two complement one another and none can be rendered irrelevant. The secretary will only need to keep her job by undergoing training 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 she will not be redundant or found wanting and she will always be relevant in today’s modern office. The importance
and indispensability and non-negotiability of the secretary in any organization cannot be overstressed. The automation, notwithstanding, secretaries are still needed for the attainment of organizational objectives which is more than mere typing of letters and receiving calls.

**Recommendations**

From the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations made by Onifade (2010) are proffered:

1. Secretaries should be flexible and adapt to changes as they come and keep abreast of innovations in the office machines, organization, attitude and responsibilities.
2. Secretaries are encouraged to tackle challenges through assignment of new responsibilities.
3. Secretaries are enjoined to be members of professional organizations.
4. Secretaries are encouraged to attend workshops, seminars and conferences which may be self-sponsored or organization-sponsored.
5. The organizations should furnish the secretary’s office with necessary equipment to enhance their effectiveness e.g. computers, printers, photocopy machine, scanner, etc.
References
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