Impact of Modern Office Technology on Secretarial Performance in Public and Private Sector Environment in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The influx of modern office technology and information systems has greatly transformed secretarial duties in both public and private organizations in the 21st century. Modern office technology and information systems have led to great changes in the role of secretaries in office occupation. Nigeria, as an emerging economy, needs modern secretaries if it is to achieve its economic goal. The importance of an office in the development of an economy cannot be overstressed. Thus, the focus of this paper is to ex-ray the impact of certain modern office technology on secretarial performance. The paper concludes among others that Specialized training programme should be organized for secretaries to enable them update their knowledge on modern office technologies, computing, communication and modern methods of data management in other to improve their proficiency and efficiency on the job and hence higher productivity in the workplace.

Keywords: Office Technology, Secretaries, Record Management, ICT.

INTRODUCTION

Office work involves reserving, processing, storing, distribution and communication of information. Secretaries are at the centre of implementing office functions and they accomplish their office tasks with the aid of office machines. Modern business organizations have come to appreciate the role and importance of the secretary as well as the need to providing the needed and necessary office machines and equipment for the efficacy of the secretarial functions (Akpomi and Ordu 2009). The efficiency and effectiveness of the secretary in every business organization depends largely on the availability of office technologies as well as the skills and competencies of the secretary. These skills and competencies required by the modern secretaries include ability to use computer to create spreadsheets with packages like Microsoft Excel, Peachtree and lotus, compose correspondences using packages like Microsoft word, WordStar, WordPerfect etc, manage databases using software like Microsoft Access; create presentations with Microsoft PowerPoint, publish reports and documents using desktop publishing software like Microsoft Office Publisher or FrontPage and do digital graphics jobs using CorelDraw. New technology has been injected into the workplace at an exponentially increasing rate over the last few decades. Many offices see new technology as the means to increase profit margins and to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving marketplace (Todd 2007). This research will discuss some of those new technologies and their impact on the secretary. Information technology is the combination of computing, telecommunication and video techniques for the purpose of acquiring, processing, storing, and disseminating vocal, pictorial, textual and numerical information (Buseni 2013). The influx of modern office technology and information

systems has greatly transformed secretarial duties in both public and private organizations in the 21st century. Modern office technology and information systems have led to great changes in the role of secretaries in office occupation. The secretaries now conduct research on the internet, operate and troubleshoot new office technology and information systems, co-ordinate administrative activities, store, retrieve and integrate information for dissemination to staff and clients.

Utilization of Modern Office Technology: A Discourse

There are a number of reasons why organizations decide to introduce new technology. These reasons according to (Dawson 2007), include: to reduce costs, increase productivity, increase quality, reduce dependence on skilled labour, to be up to date, to compete fairly with competitor organizations that are introducing new technology, because new technology is interesting and in order to change the relations between various groups in the organization. As a result of technology insertion, the role of secretaries in offices has been positively influenced - today's secretaries are exposed to office technology including the internet that makes work much easier and knowledge more accessible (Edwin 2008). It is now easier to send messages by telex, electronic mails (e-mails), fax and telephones. Other office gadgets available to the secretary are photo-copy machines, duplicating machines, dictating machines, printers, among others. This is the era of computers and information technology which has become an enabler of greater convenience. The traditional and cumbersome functions of typewriting and shorthand dictation, answering of telephone calls and processing of mails are now giving way to the automated word processing and online communications (Edwin 2008). New developments in IT have led to an increasingly mobile workforce. We are no longer tied to our desk in order to stay in the information loop. We can take our office with us wherever we go. Cellular phones allow us to be reached almost anywhere. Blackberries, PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants), Apple Ipads and Ultra-mobile PCs permit to access e-mail and other data products at a wide range of locations. A wide range of new technologies have given businesses access to faster communication, increased efficiencies, and the ability to work away from the office (Mamaghani, 2006).

According to Akpomi and Ordu (2009), there are wide range of office machines and equipment which now enable secretaries to improve their performances. Such new machines take the form of electronic typewriters that have replaced the manual ones. Word processors with milt-purpose facilities, computers and other sophisticated office machines and equipment are now provided by employers. Some of the physical equipment used by secretaries includes computer communication equipment and electronic pocket organizers. New technological equipment that has altered the procedures and technique for office functions include the computers, e-mail (electronic mail), e-commerce (electronic commerce), e-business (electronic business), voice mail, and the Internet. Adebayo and Akinleye (2012), opined that 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 even the   public. 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. The secretary who is at the centre of information has the duty of providing comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date information promptly to facilitate quality management decisions. Now and ever changing

Technology in offices has evolved the functions of the office to rely on different types of improved and standardized equipment which constitutes some threats to some secretaries. According to the Bureau of Labour (2006), secretaries serve as information and communication managers for offices, plan and schedule meetings and appointments, take minutes at meetings, organize and maintain paper work and electronic files. They disseminate information by using telephone, mail service and e-mail. Secretaries are aided in their tasks by variety of modern office equipment such as fax machines, digital photocopiers, scanners and electronic paper trimmers. In view of the highly challenging office administrative responsibilities for secretaries, coupled with the influx of office innovations in ultra modern office, it is, however, very pertinent and justifiable that any secretary who has no requisite knowledge of modern office technology will soon be displaced or replaced.

Amoor, (2010) said, because of the technological innovations and advancements in today's office, any secretary who wishes to be relevant and functional must endeavour to acquire basic skills on how to manipulate and operate office technology equipment such as computer systems, accompanying telecommunications devices such as internet connectivity and other office related automation such as digital photocopier, paper shredders, digital duplicator, scanner, teleconference devices etc. The employers of labour in this era need secretaries who are very knowledgeable and versatile in office management and in the use of modern office technology and information systems and in routine business functions such as generating, processing, storing, retrieving, handling and disseminating information with little or no supervision. Igbinedion, (2010) adopted the definition of the National Secretaries Association (International) as an assistant to an executive, possessing 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. The secretary has direct contacts with people who visit the office for one transaction or the other and their contact with the secretary can make or mar their relationship with the organization. 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 complete a task. Nigeria, as an emerging economy, needs modern secretaries if it is to achieve its economic goal. The importance of an office in the development of an economy cannot be overstressed. It is the secretary that manages the basic office resources through the use of modern office technologies (Adewale, 2009). The office is undergoing an impressive revolution in the form of massive inflow of office technology which affects the status of the secretarial profession. There is no profession that is as dynamic as the secretarial profession. This is a truism. It is therefore only the secretary that can withstand the changes and challenges of the modern office and survive them. These changes can be seen in innovation and invention pertaining to equipment, furniture, form designs, nomenclature, environment, technology, attitudes, dressing, responsibilities, training, skill, ability, knowledge, educational institutions and their curricula. But for the purpose of this research, I shall dwell only on the technological changes and innovations that are taking place in offices today and how they impact on the secretary. The impact of technology on organizations is a complete restructuring of the labour force and a massive increase in productivity and output (Dawson 2007). These impacts are in cluster of how modern reprographic technologies have facilitated secretarial functions

in the office. Reprography is the reproduction of documents or graphics through mechanical or electrical means such as photocopy, and xerography. Modern records management technologies like the computer and database management software used to manage files and records as against the old and to manual practices of files and file cabinets. Data processing technology, which deals with how different kinds of electrically propelled gadgets are used to process data in a fast, simple, easy and accurate form for smooth organizational decision making. Modern office technology also has a role and impact on the improvement of organizational, personal and inter-personal communication in the office where the secretary works. Office functions include receiving and giving information which need specialized and sophisticated gadgets to manage them. There is no aspect of office function that technology has not taken over. The only thing certain about the future of technology in the workplace is that it will continue to change and evolve at an astounding rate. Despite any pitfalls, the implementation of this new technology, especially office technology, is necessary for a company to remain competitive in today's market and in the future (Todd 2007).

An Assessment of Modern Technologies and Records Management Practices in Modern Office Administration

Records management, or RM, is the practice of maintaining the records of an organization from the time they are created up to their eventual disposal. This may include classifying, storing, securing, and destruction (or in some cases, archival preservation) of records. A record can be either a tangible object or digital information: for example, birth certificates, medical x-rays, office documents, databases, application data, and e-mail (Porter 2006). Noris (2006) wrote that Records management is the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use, and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records. Records, therefore, have value and add to the intrinsic worth of the organization. Records need to be managed in a meaningful way so they can be accessed and used in the course of daily business functions. Records are recorded information, regardless of medium or characteristics, made or received by an organization in the transaction of business. Record keeping occupies a strategic position in the efficient and effective management of any office system. Infact, it is central in the administration of offices because it documents the planning and implementation of appropriate course of services allowing proper monitoring of work (Igwoku 2008). The records life cycle consists of discrete phases covering the life span of a record from its creation to its final disposition. In the creation phase, records growth is expounded by modern electronic systems. Records will continue to be created and captured by the organization at an explosive rate as it conducts the business of the organization (Noris 2006). Once a record is created, controls are triggered to regulate its access and distribution. Role security may be set on a repository allowing access to approved users. Just as the records of the organization come in a variety of formats, the storage of records can vary throughout the organization. File maintenance may be carried out by the owner, designee, a records repository, or clerk. Records may be managed in a centralized location, such as a records center or repository, or the control of records may be decentralized across various departments and locations within an organization (Porter 2006).

Records may be formally and discretely identified by coding and housed in folders specifically designed for optimum protection and storage capacity, or they may be casually identified and filed with no apparent indexing. Organizations that manage records casually find it difficult to access and retrieve information when needed (Agbatogun 2011). Records could be active or inactive. An active record is any record that is needed to conduct current business in an organization. While an inactive record is a record that is no longer needed to conduct current business but is being preserved until it meets the end of its retention period, such as when a project ends, a product line is retired, or the end of a fiscal reporting period is reached. Records are managed according to the retention schedule. Once the life of a record has been satisfied according to its predetermined period and there are no legal holds pending, it is authorized for final disposition, which may include destruction, transfer, or permanent preservation. Akporhonor and Iwhiwhu (2007) citing Popoola (2000), assert that what actually keeps an organization or a business going is documented information called "records," which are used for planning, decision making, and controlling. The need for a records management programme in all organizations cannot be overstressed in the digital age.   Secretaries are instrumental in controlling and safeguarding the information assets of the office. They understand how to manage the creation, access, distribution, storage, and disposition of records and information in an efficient and cost-effective manner using Records Management technology, methodology, principles, and best practices. In the past, paper records were filed in a records center and the records clerk would declare and classify the record and manage any activity against the record including its final disposition. With the advent of electronic documents and records, all of that has changed and the burden of classifying and declaring records has moved, by necessity, from a dedicated records clerk and manual methods of pen and paper to the use of computers and other related technologies (Agbatogun 2011).

According to Adesina, Udo, Ndoomi and Aliyu (2012), documents are created at all levels within an organization, from the executive to the clerical worker as well as being received from outside sources. These documents may be any physical or digital object such a paper contract received in the mail or a contract created in a word processing program. While newly created or received documents are not necessarily records, the Records Management system must be able to work with all of the applications that create documents or produce information. These applications may include: MS Office products such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Scanning and Imaging applications – Paper may be scanned and digitized by an imaging system and this digitized document may become the official record, Email is ubiquitous and is increasingly used to conduct business operations, New media/content types (wikis, blogs, IM, text messaging, etc) (Dawson 2007). Today's offices are creating and receiving records at an astonishing rate. The volume of records is not only staggering but the records also come in a variety of formats such as: word processing documents, emails, faxes, instant messaging, text messaging, digital images – scanned paper documents, new media types such as blogs and wikis popularly known as wikipedia (Dawson 2007). Given the volumes of documents, combined with the diverse number of formats, companies are finding it nearly impossible to effectively manage their documents and records without an electronic records management system (Adewale 2009).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

That modern office technology improved data processing in the office is not an exaggeration. The result shows that payrolling and stock management are handled better in office by the use of modern technologies. It is a fact that modern technologies and computers have eased data capturing, coding, analysis, data entering and editing process. It is the conclusion of this paper that Modern Office Technology like reprographic technology, records management technology, data processing technology, word processing technology and communications technology has great positive impact on secretarial performance. It is the recommendation of this paper also that, regular workshops, seminars and conferences should be organized for secretaries on office technology and ICT for optimum performance in their duties and use of modern equipments.

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