

Capacity Building in Modern Office Technology: An Imperative for Effective Secretarial Productivity

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Abstract: This study emphasized on the need for capacity building of secretaries in modern office technology. The rationale for capacity building in office technology was discussed as well as areas of modern office technology to be acquired by secretaries. The paper concluded that modern secretaries should be abreast of the importance and use of modern office technology and recommended the need for training programme to be organized periodically for secretaries to update their knowledge on modern office skills and institutions training secretaries must include in their curriculum these modern office technology skills for programme relevance.

Key words: Building, capacity, office, secretarial & productivity, technology

INTRODUCTION

The role of a secretary is indispensable in every organization. A secretary according to Mayer (1977) is an executive assistant who possesses a mastery of office skills, demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility with or without supervision, exercises initiatives and judgment and makes decision within the scope of assigned authority. The secretary is a public relations expert, a staff assistant, the boss's office memory. The secretary is responsible for much of the detail work of the office and is expected to carry out the duties with a minimum of supervision and direction. He is expected to represent the organization and the employer attractively to the public and generates good human relations in working with all employees in the organization (Nwosu, 1997). This explains that a qualified secretary should have a wide knowledge of business acumen, be versatile in office practice, communication and knowledge of the operation of all departments within the organization where he works, unlike a half-baked secretary who possesses only knowledge of shorthand, typewriting and basic office practices.

Duniya (2011) observed that due to the introduction of sophisticated technological (electronic) office equipment into today's office and the role secretaries need to play in ensuring accuracy and efficiency in their jobs, the secretaries need to meet the challenges by acquiring new skills and competencies for efficient operations in the electronic office. There is continuous advancement in technology which has affected the secretarial profession in terms of the quality, speed and accuracy of works performed. This has led to the introduction of various electronic facilities to ensure adequate secretarial practice in organization. It is essential that secretaries are properly trained on the usage of these modern facilities to enhance their level of productivity. This paper therefore discussed

the rationale for capacity building in modern office technology and the office technology skills needed by modern secretaries.

Rationale for capacity building in modern office technology: The proficiency level of a secretary is highly determined by the availability and usage of modern office technology provided in the office environment as well as the acquired skills and competencies of the secretary. This is based on the fact that modern offices are automated. Automation is a collection of methods for controlling machinery and production processes by mechanical method, usually with electronic equipment (Akpomi and Ordu, 2009). Automation entails an integration of work station where the secretary would have access to the electronic equipments needed to create, process, store, retrieve and disseminate information. The advent of automation has ushered in an electronic era whereby human works are done by machines. The introduction of modern Information Communication and Technology equipment has affected the demands of the modern secretary. The duties of secretaries have been revolutionized especially in the areas of communication, telecommunication, micrograph and reprography. The technology has replaced mechanical technology; new technologies are replacing the old ones. Typing, keyboarding and voice processing are now used in place of dictation and carbonizations. In the area of reprography stencil duplication has been replaced by computer print outs and Xeroxing systems. In the area of micrograph and telecommunications, horizontal suspension and other systems are now replaced by compact disc run and d-base computer systems. Telephones have gone digital while teleconferencing, internet and networking are currently used. The modern office unlike the traditional office makes use of e-mail, fax and other telecommunication equipment.

It is imperative to note that currently there is a high demand for skilled and technological trained workers. Regrettably, most secretarial graduates acquire theoretical knowledge which does not match well with the demands of work place. There is acute shortage of trained personnel in the application of software, operating system, network communication and local technicians to service and repair computer facilities. The secretaries today are not only required to have theoretical and practical knowledge and skills in ICT computer operations, but to be exposed to the use of some computer packages like excel, data base management, etc. They should be conversant with the issue of interconnectivity, e-commerce, skills in browsing the website, skills in data protection techniques and security and adequate knowledge of how to use search engines to gain access to lots of educational resources. In a study carried out by Ntukidem (2000), he found out that advancement in technology has continued unabated and has enriched and widened the scope and practice of the secretarial profession in terms of work quality, speed, accuracy and variety. He also concluded that today, the secretarial profession is faced with array of telecommunication tools and facilities based on modern technology.

Modern office technology skills: Traditionally, a professional secretary performs his normal office skills which take much physical and mental ability. The introduction of electronic equipments of various forms 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 equipments 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 at the VDU which enables the secretary to effect corrections like deleting or inserting words, sentences and paragraphs before printing the documents (Agomuo, 2005). Word processors are programmed for automatic centering, 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, shared logic word processor, and time shared services.

- **Computers:** Oliver and Chapman (1993) defined a computer as a device that works 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 communications 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 produce copies of works, scan images 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 world wide system of computer network. Users of one computer in an environment if permitted can gain access to information from computers in other environments. The internet 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 data base 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 data base is to meet the information needs of an organization. Using the data base 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 messages 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 buyers and sellers coming together to exchange goods and services. Instead of the traditional method of using of doing buying and selling, e-commerce entails transactions of buyers and sellers over networked computers.
- **Teleconferencing:** This makes it possible for organization of meeting among geographically separated participants thus saving transport cost, traveling 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 enabled 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 meetings are 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 computer in which the participants view themselves as they are 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.
- **Fascimile (Fax) machine:** This machine sends and receives documents and letters over telephone lines reproducing both text and pictures.

- **The cellphone/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 document. The equipment varies in size depending on the volume of multiple copies to be made. Equipment under reprography are photocopier, cyclostyling/mimeograph machines and lithopress.

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.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Secretaries perform various office duties in the universities and their ability to apply some of these modern office technology leads to efficiency in the performance of their assigned roles. It is therefore recommended that the necessary office technology equipment should be provided in every organization and training and retraining programme should be organized for secretaries in every organization for occupational relevance.

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