INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY SKILLS NEEDED BY OFFICE MANAGERS/SECRETARIES

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Abstract

Secretaries/office technology managers in today’s office/business cannot achieve a reasonable percentage of organizational objectives without adequate knowledge, experience and skills with which to operate and manipulate the ICT machines and devices that will ensure accuracy, efficiency, standardization and increasing productivity of secretaries. In the light of this, the paper examined the following concepts: information, communication, technology, information and communication technology, the challenges of ICT and office technology managers/secretaries and their applications. Conclusion and recommendations were made that for office technology and managers/secretaries to perform credibly and achieve the organizational objectives they must acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and required experiences that will enable them to handle efficiently and effectively various ICT machines, equipment and devices in the performance of secretarial and office functions.

ICT has revolutionized the way we produce and consume our cultural beliefs, teaching and learning and most especially work in the office. The world is now referred to as a global village as a result of ICT. ICT has come to stay and will continue to live with us and improve the way we do things in all facets of life. Therefore, we must face the reality of the fact that, everybody must be ready to embrace the beauty of ICT because of its numerous advantages, opportunities and its applications to solving problems.

Information, Communication and Technology Defined

The above key words i.e. Information, Communication and Technology need to be defined for better understanding. Information is perceived as data already processed
Communication is the exchange or passing of information between persons. It also involves transmitting or exchanging of ideas or beliefs through the use of symbols, speech, letters, etc.

Information and communication go hand in hand, although information can always be communicated, yet not everything that is communicated is information. Communication becomes only when data derived from it have been organized, analysed and interpreted in such a ways that they contain meaning beyond the individual facts and can be used in decision making.

The word technology is derived from the Greek word techne meaning “art” and logos meaning “word” or “discourse”. The two words combined are technologies whose English version is technology. Effiong (2005) defined technology as “the tools people and organisations apply to operations to get things done more quickly, more easily or more efficiently.”

Hornby (2000) defined technology as: the study, mastery and utilization of manufacturing and industrial methods, systematic application of knowledge to practical task in industry. This implies that technology refers to the use of application of those methods that is industrial and manufacturing tools for the purpose of information communication. Therefore, when technology is applied to information and communication, it becomes information and communication technology.

**Information and Communication Technology Concept**

Agbanu (2005), see ICT as the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, process, transmit and retrieve information. It is the system of creating, processing, disseminating and use of vocal, pictorial, textual and numerical information.

ICT is the combination of electronic and telecommunication so that large amount of data and information can be stored and transmitted. Ayo (2001), sees the concepts of ICT as the computer system and telecommunication equipment in information processing using the computer, transmission of information using telecommunication equipment and dissemination of information in multimedia.

Okereke and Ndinechi (2005) defined ICT as the processes involved in obtaining, packaging and communicating information. The National Policy on Information Technology (2001) defines ICT in two ways:

*ICT means computer, ancillary equipment, software and hardware and similar procedures, services (including support services) and related resources.*
ICT includes any equipment or interconnected system or subsystem of equipment that is used in automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange and transmission of reception of data or information.

As a result of the above discussion, one can simply liken ICT to a case of a mechanized farmer who has every machine, equipment, tool, chemical and required skill and experience with which he can use in his farm to ensure proper cultivation of land, pest control, etc. that will in turn contribute to effective germination and bountiful harvest of his farm products. ICT also refers to all forms of technology and tools applied to processing, storing and transmitting information in electronic form that would enable and assist secretaries/office technology managers to discharge their secretarial and office functions as effective as possible.

For office technology managers/secretaries to be relevant and continue to be relevant in the world of work, he/she must have adequate knowledge, skills and experiences on how to use and operate most of these ICT tools in his/her office. As a result of the tremendous amount of information available and limited capacity of the human memory, it has become necessary that office technology managers/secretaries should rely on the unlimited capacity of ICT.

As the office technology managers/secretaries saddle with responsibility of carrying out secretarial office functions of various types, the acquisition of ICT skills and experiences that will enhance efficient and effective performance of their duties cannot be over-emphasized.

Chuke (2005) admitted that: for secretaries to cope with the new trend in ICT, secretaries needed to be trained as they lack the basic training and competence to handle today’s office jobs. This will help them to improve their basic skills and enhance their communication skill needed to actualize their job requirement.

The Challenges of ICT and Office Technology Managers/Secretaries

Organisations require from office managers/secretaries high degree of effectiveness, efficiency, accuracy, speed, timely performance and delivery of task, increase productivity and many more. It is therefore, imperative and inevitable for prospective, new entrants and existing secretaries into the world of work to be well prepared in order to meet and deliver their job performance effectively and efficiently as expected towards contributing to the achievement of organizational objectives.

Secretarial profession has become more vast and highly demanding than it used to be in the past hence, the need to change from the use of archaic and slow manual office equipment and machines to highly sophisticated ones which include ICT resources, internet etc. in order to enhance their productivity and efficiency in the office.

Since secretarial and ICT skills are those abilities that will enable the secretary to perform office duties most effectively, therefore, skills required of office technology
managers/secretaries need regular evaluation for current update wherewithal to meet the changes of time.

Solutions to Challenges Posted by ICT on Managers/Secretaries

The knowledge of training the old workforce acquired have become obsolete because of changing requirements, the existing work patterns and practices need to be updated more or less continuously to keep pace the with the prevailing technological development. Babangida (1998) puts it more clearly, ‘you should avoid the fatal mistake of proverbial dinosaur which lived on it its past glory, refused to learn new methods, failed to adapt to changing times and which had to face definite extinction.’

Secretaries need to be on the new techniques in managing information using the latest information and communication technologies. This will go a long way in improving their skills and efficiency. Secretaries’ trainers in institution of higher learning need to be trained and retrained with the new technology to stay professionally above board and impact the much needed technology skills on prospective secretaries.

ICT Skills Required of Office Technology Managers/Secretaries

Modern secretaries are often the employees that hold an office or organisation together by making sure staffers and customers are in the right place at the right time and have appropriate document and information needed. The type and size of company a secretary works will often dictate what skills are required. However, these are some basic secretarial skills on information communication technology that secretaries should master.

i) Technological skills
ii) Interpersonal Skills
iii) Writing skills
iv) Transcription skills
v) Multi tasking skills
vi) Teamwork skills
vii) Attention to Details
viii) Research Skills

1) Technological skills

All secretaries need technological skills in order to allow them to perform some variety of computer-based task such as spreadsheet, preparing presentations, creating and typing, advanced e-mail abilities, including working and attachment. Therefore, secretaries who are proficient in a variety of computer software applications will have the most career opportunities. Some of the most common technological skills that secretaries must master include, word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, document and management, desktop publishing and video conferencing.
ii) **Interpersonal Skills:** Secretaries must interact daily with their boss, co-workers and customers. Therefore, interpersonal skills and communication skills are essential. In addition to face to face contact, secretaries communicate by e-mail, telephone and teleconferencing system. It is important for secretaries to be able to clearly communicate and share information with customers and colleagues in variety of ways.

iii) **Writing Skills:** In an organisation, secretaries are frequently responsible for drafting routine correspondence and filing documents as well as proof reading of document, such as pleading brief, discovery and transactional documents. Writing is an integral part of the secretary’s job, those who develop strong writing skills will become indispensable to the boss or employer they assist.

iv) **Transcriptional Skills:** Transcriptional skills are foundational to secretarial practice. In addition to a fast typing speed (employer minutes), keen listening skills are required to comprehend voice dictation files, strong grammar, spelling, as well as understanding some terminologies. In addition, secretaries must be proficient in word processing applications and transcription equipment.

v) **Multi Tasking Skills:** Most secretaries work for more than one person or more than one simultaneously. Performing multiple tasks is second nature to a competent secretary. They know how to juggle multiple assignment and competing priorities and how to manage growing workload in today’s office where one person frequently perform the job of three.

vi) **Teamwork Skills:** A secretary must have a teamwork spirit because that is the most efficient way secretaries know how to get along with co-workers and collaborate with others in order to get things done.

vii) **Attention to Details:** Attention to details is a crucial skill required by a secretary. This skill is critical in the legal profession, for example typing N60,000, in a settlement instead of N600,000 could result to a problem.

viii) **Research Skills:** Secretaries perform internet research for multiple or tasks such as finding directions, gathering client information, researching the competition and locating expert wireless. Many secretaries especially those in small law offices, also perform paralegal duties, including legal research, cite checking and tracking down case law, learning legal research platform such as west law.
To be relevant in today’s office, computer and word processing skills is a must for all office technology managers/secretaries because computer has simplified through mechanisation and all aspects of office functions and secretarial procedures. Every computer has word processing facilities.

Ayo (1994) defined computer as an electronic device which accepts and processes data by following a set of instructions (programme) to produce an accurate and efficient result (information). At the end of the present revolution of ICT is the computer which means all other technologies revolve round the computer. It is a powerful tool that can be programmed to do virtually anything imaginable. Computer is a general purpose device that can be applied to various kinds of operations depending on the desire and application software.

Today, many organisations in the world have resorted to the use of computers in processing documents. A secretary using a computer connected to a printer, telephone line, scanner and other electronic equipment can perform series of tasks just within a twinkle of an eye.

Office technology managers/secretaries rely on ICT in their day-to-day operations. Without the use of ICT, most business organisations in both the public and private sectors would neither be able to develop new markets nor expand existing ones. Ntukidem (2005), said that the aid of database, information can be inputted, accessed, sorted, extracted and stored in variety of ways by the office technology managers/secretaries.

Internet

The internet is a global connection of many different types of computers, computer operators and computer networks that are linked together through telephone lines, satellites, microwaves and all other possible devices. Internet makes communication possible over the globe. Once you subscribe and connect to the internet service provider (ISP), you could access any information you need anywhere in the world.

Ntukidem (2005) described internet as a vast information super highway that facilitates communication between computer users both nationally and internationally.

In the view of Ohakwe (2001), internet is a major breakthrough in technology and revolution. The wonders of the millennium are indeed the most flexible medium currently available in a technological era.

**How to Connect to the Internet**

Before connecting to the internet, you must determine how you are going to connect to the internet. Are you going to connect to the internet using a modem or a broadband internet connection?
Connecting to Internet Using a Modem

Connecting to internet using a modem is the most widely available method of connecting to the internet. Although connecting to the internet with a modem is a much cheaper solution, it will be a much slow connection. If you plan on doing more than the occasional uses surfing and reading and sending e-mail, you should consider broadband.

To connect to the internet using a modem, your computer must have a modem and be in reach of being connected to your home phone line. Almost every computer manufacturers are not including modems because of the increased popularity of broadband connections.

Once you have verified your computer is compatible with connecting to the internet, you will need to determine who you are going to connect to the internet through. In order to connect to the internet, you will need to have an internet service provider (ISP). In most areas you will be able to connect to the internet in either using local ISP, which is a company in your city that makes its business by selling internet connections. Or you may want to consider a larger ISP such as AOL and MSN which is a larger international company with location all over the United States and the world.

Check your local listing for available companies capable of providing you with the services.

Connecting to the Internet Using a Broadband Connection

Connecting to the internet over broadband is becoming a popular solution for connecting to the internet. Broadband is a much faster solution for connecting to the internet when compared to a modem and allows you to do more exciting things on the internet, such as watching movies, listening to music, playing games, and have a much enjoyable experience, loading web pages without having to wait for each page to load.

Unfortunately, however, this service, even today is not available in all areas. Therefore before getting this service, you must first determine if it is available in your area. Most broadband services are provided by your local phone companies or cable companies. Contact your local service provider to see if they have a broadband service available in your area.

If the broadband service is available in your area, the company will often provide you with the hardware required in order to connect the service. Often, you will have to either have a computer with a network and @ 45-connector connection or a USB connection to connect to the most services.

Internet resources are many but few among them are: E-mail, Newsgroup/Usenet, Internet, World-wide-web (www), Telecommuting/Tele-working, Computer Aided Telephony, Video or Tele-conferencing, Facsimile (Fax).
Electronic Mail (E-mail)

Electronic mail popularly called E-mail is a resource that can be used on the internet which allows people to send and receive messages to and from any part of the world. A registered user types his/her message on the computer, specifies an e-mail address that identifies the receiver. The message travels via your modem which connects your computer to the internet through the telephone network. Ohakwe (2007) stated that, the purpose of the e-mail is to send data or messages electronically through the telephone network or data network and through a central computer without posting such pieces of paper or dispatch documents by courier services.

How to Open E-mail

You can open and access your e-mail from any part of the world. To do this, follow the steps below:

a) Open the Internet Explorer from your window desktop
b) On the address bar, type yahoo.com (or hotmail.)
c) Press Ctrl+Enter key together. The yahoo home page will appear on your screen
d) Place your mouse arrow on E-mail (upper right of the screen) and when it changes to the hand sign, click on it.
e) Click on sign me up under the free Edition to get an email ID for free
f) Fill the form that will be provided for you accordingly, click ‘submit this form’ when you are through with the filling.

In major cases, the ID you will use, might have been used by someone else. In that case, you will have to modify the ID by either the inclusion of numbers or alphabets. E.g. idele4real@yahoo.com or idele4real2013@yahoo.com

NOTE: In opening an e-mail address, you will be required to have a password. Your password must not be less than six (6) digits, It is your key to your inbox and you must not disclose it to everyone as they could access your inbox with it at any time without your further consent.

World-Wide-Web

The world-wide-web is hypertext-based information that links multimedia data base in different parts of the world through the internet. It is a situation whereby a page is acquired by individual or organisation on the internet. Individual or organisation that acquires the page stores information relating to the organisation and thus gives license to people to have access to the site and this can be done when they browse the internet and log unto the site.
Telecommuting/Tele-Working

This is a way by which the performance of office work is carried out at a site away from the office and communicating the results to the head office electronically by means of a telephone, computer, or e-mail using a modem. It involves applying information technology and communication techniques to the organisation so that firms can have large amount of the employees. It enables secretaries or office workers working at the same time in premises provided by their employers work together.

Computer Aided Telephony

Telephone has been in operation over the years, but series of developmental improvement in technological advancement have enhanced the ability of telephone services for secretarial workers. Computer Aided Telephony involves using the computer to dial from directory without the need to dial from a separate telephone handset. This extension enables the software to scan a list of customers and select those who need to be connected, and each of them being dialed automatically coupled with the ability of the software to take appropriate action of continuous trying until a contact is made when such number is engaged.

Video or Tele-Conferencing

Teleconferencing is described as an activity where users converse with others in the real time, speaking through their screen. Calneck (1993) liked it to video conferencing system in which a number of users are simultaneously online, chatting and discussing. Chuke (2005) suggested the following advantages of teleconferencing as simplicity, satisfaction, empowerment, immediacy and cost effect. He further added that by typing into and reading from their personal computers, participants avoid the time and expenses of travel and the logistic problems of scheduling face to face meetings.

Conclusion

The role of ICT cannot be ignored in the efficient and effective performance of office technology managers/secretaries towards the achievement of organisational objectives.

ICT has provided and opened a lot of ways by which office technology managers/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. ICT contributes and enables management decision making in an organisation, it eliminates deterioration which characterised paper office, it serves as a permanent residential quarters for information where they can be contacted easily in their perfect state of being as at when needed for communicating.
Therefore, office technology managers/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 business world.

**Recommendation**

In order to ensure that office technology managers/secretaries perform their office functions and secretarial duties efficiently and effectively with the use of ICT to achieve organisational objectives and be relevant at all time in the world of work, the following recommendations were made:

1) Office Technology Managers/Secretaries should embark on ICT training courses, seminars, workshops both for existing and prospective secretaries at regular intervals to keep in pace with the current wave in this technologically changing world.

2) Appropriate legislation and implementation procedures should be in place that will encourage more public and private business organisations adapt to the use of suitable or appropriate ICT in the performance of secretarial functions by the secretaries.

3) The cost of procurement and installation of some ICT devices are still out of the reach of the common man. Therefore, government should reduce import duties or tax free ICT devices and gadgets to enable more people and organisations have them.

4) Secretarial training institutions such as schools, polytechnics, colleges of education, universities, etc 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.

5) Recruitment and retention of qualified maintenance and support service staff to render assistance and provide on-the-spot maintenance services on ICT in various organisations should be vigorously pursued to reduce operating costs.

6) Government should make electricity available for 24 hours a day. Apart from this, a standby generator should be provided by respective organisations as electricity supply is the key fact for ICT development in any economy.

**References**


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