

THE USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AND ITS EFFECTS ON OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT PRACTITIONER'S PERFORMANCE IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: The secretary is the chief organiser of meetings scheduling of appointments for or on behalf of the boss these attributes put the secretary at the centre of playing a very important role in the efficient management of the organization. The use of Office automation and ICT in general has made the secretary to be part of office technology and management practitioner. However, in this paper secretary is referred to as office technology and management practitioner. The efficiency and effectiveness of performing these functions depend mainly on the availability of the desired proficiencies and skills acquired by the secretary in the organisation. This paper examines the office technology management performance of the secretary from the Malaysian secretary's perspective. To achieve these objectives, thematic data analysis was employed using card index analysis. Semi structured interview was used as a data collection instrument. 12 participants participated in the data collection. Purposive sampling was used in the study were criteria was adopted in selecting the sample of the study. The findings of the study revealed that ICT competency is a major factor that contributes to the performance of the secretary in the organisation. The paper concludes that training and re-training of the secretary is very important in order to update the secretary on new merging office technologies, at the end the paper recommended that appropriate training programmes on the use of office technology equipment for secretaries should be put in place.

Keywords: Secretary, Technology, Management, Performance, Practitioner's.

INTRODUCTION

A secretary is an assistant to an executive officer or a manager, the secretary who is trained to type and perform many office duties. The secretary possesses personal and business attributes. The secretary guards his professional ethics of confidentiality, good appearance and absolute loyalty (Onifade, 2010). The work of the secretary is characterized by handling and processing of information. In this paper, Office Technology Management refers to the management of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities by secretaries in the execution of their tasks. Secretarial practices in the public and private sectors have witnessed several changes with regard to the roles and tasks of the secretary (Akpormi & Ordu, 2009). Office machines and equipment that were used to store records, produce, duplicate and disseminate information in organisations has undergone

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numerous transformations in order to go in line with the fast growing world of technology (Castels & Gustavo, 2005). In the present day practice, an important aspect that makes organizations exceptional is the use of modern ICT equipment (Ilomaki, 2008).

The secretary, due to the nature of his work has remained to be a key player in the success of achieving organisational goals and objectives. Many organisations relied on the secretary's abilities for the achievement of their organizational goals and objectives (Nwaokwa & Okoli, 2012). There are a lot of forces such as consumer behaviour, market competition, efficient service delivery, technology and quality management, which are drivers to organizational changes in the present day business world. Every organisation needs correct facts and accurate information for appropriate and beneficial decision making (Akpomi & Ordu, 2009). The role played by the secretary in the organisation is very important as regards to the progress of that organisation were the secretary works. Therefore, the need for technological and human support for the secretary from the organisation where he/she work is much desirable. The efficient and effective performance of the secretary in the organisation depends on the optimal utilisation of the office technologies as well as the knowledge and skills, of manipulating the available office technologies. The emergence of modern office ICTs has reduced the tedious tasks of repeating tasks several times. There petitionous nature of production, reproduction, storage and retrieval of information has been removed by the presence of the ICT (Fry et. al., 2009).

However, development of office technologies which resulted in the creation and use of computers and software programmes has simplified the work of the secretary (Malavia & Gogia, 2010). The output of the present day secretary is quite higher if compared with that of the old time secretary. This is evident if the benefits of using these technologies such as the printer, pen drive, hand phones, photo copier, e-mail, the zimbra and internet were viewed as factors maximizing the secretaries general output. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to examine the performance of the secretary on the use of office technologies and management in Malaysia. The study also discussed office technology competencies and their usage as well as their impact on the secretary's productivity.

THE ROLE OF ICT IN ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

The secretary is an employee that coordinates office activities and performs secretarial assignments for professional or management staff (Robert et. al., 2011). These functions could entirely be carried out to assist only one superior employee or may be for the benefit of more than one. Secretarial assignments carried out by secretaries include such duties as general office coordination, scheduling meetings, preparing and maintaining office records and writing reports. These multitude tasks

made the secretary to be versatile and well accustomed to the operational activities of the organisations.

The emergence of office Technologies has made the secretary's role to change from traditional roles to modernity (Edwin, 2008). The secretaries have access to modern office technology such as the computers, internet, hand phones and fax. These ICT make the work of the secretary much easier. This factor has contributed to the positive performance of the secretaries in the organizations around the world. This is because the secretaries find it easier to send messages and communicate using the e-mail, group collaboration software such as Zimbra, fax and through the telephone. Zimbra is one of open source software used by the participants in this study. This and similar software is used by the secretaries because it enables the secretary to coordinate and execute the tasks accordingly. In contrast, the email, fax machine and the telephone are common in offices. The computers and ICT help the secretaries to write, edit and send memos, letters and reports within and outside the organisation as fast as possible (Mumini & Hawa, 2014).

Duniya (2011) recounted that offices in the 21st century are well equipped with office technology devices that facilitate productivity, accuracy and efficiency of work output. The presence and the availability of these facilities in the organisations of the secretaries, and the ability of the secretaries in using the facilities had a great impact on the performance of the secretaries. This is made possible through the use of computers and several computers software to manage several secretarial tasks. The result of such performance is attributed to the fact that the secretarial profession has undergone tremendous transformation. This is evidenced by the fact that secretarial functions that were previously done manually have now been computerised (Atakpa, 2010). Affirming the above assertion, Aynsley (2015) reported that any office of today that is lacking in ICT, work in such offices would be boring and uninteresting.

This shows that the secretarial work in offices where ICT facilities are available would be found to be friendly and sociable. This situation persists in the offices of the secretaries visited during data collection. The offices were well equipped with ICT facilities. It was also discovered that the secretaries are well trained to use the facilities. This is an indication that technological changes have tremendously transformed the traditional role of secretaries offices. The traditional roles include typewriting and shorthand dictation, answering of telephone calls and processing of mails. In recent times, modern secretaries are exposed to high technology such as the internet which simplifies duties and enhance knowledge accessibility (Edwin, 2008). These technologies make it easier to send messages by fax, telex and electronic mails. There are several office equipment that are available, namely; duplicating machines, dictating machines, printers and photocopy machines to mention a few.

From the history of the secretarial profession qualifications, which requires the ability to take dictations in shorthand and transcribe the dictated document with a typewriter, up to the present modern secretary's requisite qualifications, knowledge and skills, the position of the secretary seemed to be a challenging one. Nevertheless, the improvement of office technologies is promising that the work of the secretary will be easier. But the most challenging aspect is the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and competencies by secretaries in order to optimally utilise the ICT resources at their disposal. Potentially, for the secretary to be up-to-date with technological changes in order to do away with the old methods of doing things, the secretary needs training and re-training in order to be able to give maximum contributions to the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

The secretary has to be well developed in terms of education as well as well-equipped with office technology gadgets in order to meet the present challenges of the modern office. It is indeed a known fact that the roles of secretaries in the modern organisations have been revolutionised by technology (Armah, 2015). This revolution has created an avenue that permits the secretary to migrate from a mere receptionist and information recorders to business strategies (Appah & Emeh, 2011; Adedoyin, 2010; Igbinedeon, 2010). Nowadays, the responsibilities of the secretary have advanced beyond typing, receiving and managing visitors coming into the organisation. Secretarial tasks have now advanced to a multi-line operation of office machines like the computers, the internet, photocopying machines, telephone handling, adding machines as well as organizing schedules and appointments for superior officers.

Due to the nature of the work of the secretary, a large amount of resourceful initiatives is required from the secretary in dealing with information with regards to official tasks. The importance of information being an essential resource among several duties of the secretary has made it necessary for the secretary not to be left out of information and communication development. While in the past the secretarial profession was seen as playing a mere supporting role in the office, the present secretary has to stand up to the challenges of modern office needs, because low performance and inability to urgently meet up with the technological changes in the office could pose threat to the secretary's career (Akpormi & Ordu, 2009). This confirms that the secretary, who is the chief organizer of meetings, record keeping, handling of incoming and outgoing mails of the organisation and one who manages various activities in the office, should be up-to-date with the desired ICT skills as well as take some measures that could improve the secretary's skills and performance (Mdlongwa, 2012).

Another important aspect of office technology used by the secretary is the internet. The Internet has revolutionized the computer and communications purview like ever before (Barry et. al., 2009). The development of telephone, hand phones, radio, and

computers set the pace for this extraordinary assimilation of internet capabilities. Barry et. al.(2009) reported that the provision of internet facility symbolizes one of the most successful examples of the benefits of sustained investment and commitment to research and development of information infrastructure. These benefits also involved the use of ICT by the secretary in executing tasks. Indeed, the internet assists the secretary in the execution of the secretarial tasks by providing easy access and dissemination of information effectively. Through the internet links between individuals, nations, organizations, businesses and education, tremendous progresses have been brought educationally, socially, economically and politically (Guttermaan et. al., 2009). The barrier of space and time has collapsed completely. This is also assisting the secretaries in simplifying their duties.

Onifade (2010) reported that ICT has many advantages apart from using it for pleasure and entertainment, it is also used for study and work purposes. ICT encourages learning; it motivates the individual and at the same time gives the individual the capability to do certain activities. This activates involves secretarial practice where secretaries use the ICT to execute their work. ICT enables the secretaries to coordinate the logistics of face-to-face meetings (Beqri, 2014). ICT is also used by the secretaries to catalogue expertise of organizational members and as a result facilitates access to the right people and enhances the dissemination of information and knowledge sharing (Nader & Shamsuddin, 2009).

Computer-mediated communication such as electronic mail or computer conferences helps the secretary to maintain continuity and connection between conversations, especially for those in different locations (Al-Hawamdeh, 2002). In organising meetings and other official gatherings, the secretary uses ICT to execute these tasks efficiently and effectively. This is among the various uses and advantages of ICT to the secretarial profession. There are several equipment of information and communication technology available to secretaries today for application in organisations and offices (Onifade, 2009). In this age of information revolution, there are many information centres that challenge and compete with each other in the provision of information (Nwaoka & Okoli, 2012). There are some areas in which various ICT products are preferred ahead of others in the secretarial tasks management, these products could be that of word processing, record keeping and preservation of resources.

The ICT provides the secretary with an advantage of keeping backup information in case the original information is lost. It is therefore required for the secretary to update practical knowledge and ICT competencies through long and short term training. Indeed, ICT enables self-placed learning in which the secretary can explore the benefits of ICT to improve on the work (Livingston & Tonia, 2012). Additionally, Abubakar (2010) reported that computer technology gives high consideration as the preferred resources for preserving information, and an avenue for documentation

and capturing of information. Computer literacy is important in this information age, though what is more fundamental and more difficult is information literacy. This is because there must be the required thinking and communication skills which are supposed to be used to handle and process information in any form. Without information literacy, Andoh (2012) maintains that there would be the danger of uncritically accepting whatever is on the internet and failing to see the need to look other sources of information.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is focused on discussing the performance of office technology and management practitioners. Therefore, the research design used in this study is qualitative in nature because the study is going to look for data that would provide detailed information about the topic. In addition to the above, qualitative study concentrates on human behaviour and social life in natural settings and this study is an issue based which requires elaborative explanations from the participants (Punch, 2009). An example of such natural settings could be a situation how the secretary may feel about his or her working environment, the working facilities or his relationship with his superior that needs detailed explanations. A total of 12 secretaries from institutions of higher learning in Malaysia participated in the study. Open-ended interviews were used in the data collection. This gave participants the opportunity to respond in their own views and words, rather than compelling them to choose from a pre-determined response (s) (Creswell, 2007). However, thematic data analysis was done in this paper using a card index (Bazeley, 2013; Petra & Primorac, 2015).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study were truthfully represented to the context in which it appears. This paper thoughtfully sticks to the concept of issue being studied on the ethical norms of the findings. This made the subjectivity of the study to be connected with the reality of the matter being studied. Interactions during the interviews gave the participants the opportunity to freely speak out their minds on issues bothering the work of the secretary. Interviewing all the 12 participants gave the researcher an indication that the data had reached empirical saturation, because at a point there were repetitions of what had already been said by other participants, a main reason why the interview session has to end (Baker & Edwards, 2012).

The findings shows, Microsoft office software package which comprises the MsWord, MsExcel, and MsPowerPoint are the software identified in this study to be supporting the secretarial tasks. The secretary uses the ICT software in performing different tasks in the office. The secretary uses the MsWord to perform word processing tasks, while MsExcel is used by the secretary in doing

simple calculations, record keeping. Other functions the secretary perform with this software include recording of incoming and outgoing mails, calculation of trip allowances and performing financial reports. The secretaries also use the software to perform mail merge functions by combining both the MsWord and MsExcel. Generally, all the participants were of the view that MsExcel was an important software which they used in performing some official tasks that involved calculations and other sundry functions.

Zimbra software was also identified to be supporting the secretary in the execution of important tasks of scheduling appointments for the superior. The software also supports and improve the performance of the secretary by prompting reminders to a scheduled appointment and also the secretary uses the software to send e-mail to several recipients. An important feature of Zimbra is that, the software enables synchronizing two Zimbra accounts; for example, the secretary and the superior accounts are synchronized to enable both parties monitor schedules and appointments of each other. This is important because whenever the secretary booked an appointment on behalf of the superior, the superior will immediately see the booking and if the superior is not convenient for the appointment, the superior will advise the secretary to rescheduled the appointment to another suitable time and date. This feature supports and creates flexibility for the secretary in scheduling appointments.

Participants interviewed were of the opinion that Microsoft Office contributed significantly in executing their secretarial tasks. This was indicated by the findings from the interview regarding the use of various forms of Microsoft office software available which the secretaries used in the execution of official tasks. This shows that the software is tremendously impacting on the general performance of the secretary. The software helps the secretary to improve the quality of work in the office, enhance professionalism and improve productivity. As reported by (Malon *et. al.*, 2011), office technologies especially the text processing facilities have increased specialization of skills that support and facilitate administrative, secretarial and clerical tasks.

In addition to the above, all the secretaries interviewed have made a generalized statement on the use of MsWord where they assert that the software was user friendly and they used it in performing their obligated functions which include composing letters, preparing memos, making reports and other word processing tasks. This shows that the software helps the secretary in performing their tasks which in return improves their general performance. Typing as seen by many as the main function of the secretary is now simplified with the Microsoft software which in turn improve productivity. Unlike before, typing was done using manual or electric typewriters, the job has now been simplified with the availability of MsWord (Gerry, 2009). This has immensely impacted and supported the secretaries in executing their job as well as helped the secretaries in improving their performance.

Another software's identified is the MsPowerPoint which is used by the secretary to display visual information in meetings and other official gatherings. The software is used by the secretaries in performing sundry official tasks during meetings and official briefings. The software enables the secretaries to display visual image, pictures, graphs and charts. It permits the creation of slides show of important information to be displayed during presentations in meetings or other official gatherings. The software assists the secretary to give a great deal of high quality presentation, whether for academic or non-academic purposes.

Finding has further revealed that power point is used to display reports during presentations in meetings or at any official gatherings. During the course of the interviews it was discovered that the secretary needs timely training on office technologies so that the secretary will be up to date with the emerging advancements of office technologies. This is important because decisions and ethical collaborations made within an organization are made through combined efforts between the management and the staff of that organisation (Janie, 2016). The global trend of technology in today's business climate has necessitated the need for training, although skill acquired during the training may not lead to the positive change in behaviour unless it is accompanied by motivation and a supportive environment. Therefore, the secretary need to be supported and motivated in order to assume positive changes from training acquired.

It is understood that training is the systematic development of knowledge, skills and attitudes required for working effectively (Olaniyan, 2008). Therefore, it is expected at the end of any training that a positive change of working behaviour will take place. There are documented evidences that training activities have a positive impact on the performance of individuals as argued by Kulkarni (2013) that, training proves to be a parameter for improving the ability of organizational workforce for achieving the organizational objectives. However, it is to be noted that a worthy training will surely result in promoting the essential goals of the organization. Therefore, the significance of training in an organization is instrumental to the organization's development. Hence, training is necessary because every organization that adopts a good training programme would have a controlled way of running its affairs and would have flexibility in the accomplishment of its activities as well as be able to deliver consistent and positive productive results (Kulkarni, 2013).

Organizing meetings and other official gatherings is among the functions of the secretary. However, findings have revealed that the secretary regarded ICT very useful in planning meetings. This involves the execution of the duties of the secretary before, during and after meetings. Victor (2010) recounted that the secretary's job includes planning and organizing meetings, conferences, and workshops. The secretary prepares the agenda for meetings; send notice of meetings, arranges lunch and light refreshments. The secretary develops background information for meetings; arrange a venue for meetings, provides secretarial and clerical supports,

and also provide logistical details that are needed for the accomplishment of the organizational objectives during meetings. For the secretary to carry out the above mentioned duties efficiently and effectively, he or she needs the support of ICT.

Meetings are used to coordinate efforts, share ideas, sell idea and solve problems through collective collaborations of individuals. Lloyd, (2004) reported that meeting starts from the gathering of two or more persons to foster a common objective which cannot be achieved by a single individual. In planning meetings, the secretary has several duties to perform prior, during and after the meeting. Inviting and informing members to attend meetings is a function that the secretary does before a meeting. Soliciting for information from members attending such meetings is another duty the secretary performs before a meeting. The kind of information the secretary may requestor receive prior to meetings, include asking for members opinion to be included in the agenda of the meetings. Letters of apologies from members who may not be able to attend the meeting and any other logistic requests that may facilitate the convenience of members attending the meeting (Onifade, 2010).

Further findings revealed that ICT has a great influence on secretaries functions as regards to organizing meetings in the organization. This is evidenced from the findings that the duties of the secretary for organizing meetings at present cannot be done successfully and efficiently without the use of ICT. However, the prevailing advancements in ICT have led the secretaries to properly reposition themselves with ICT knowledge in order to continue to be relevant in their places of work, as well as enable the secretaries to go with the trend of technological changes in today's modern offices (Nwaoka & Okoli, 2012).

This reason has made it a most for the secretaries to develop the habit of learning more ICT techniques in order to remain relevant in the job. Therefore, for the secretaries to be relevant in their organizations, and in order for them to keep their jobs, they need to go with the needs for the modern office which include ICT global trend. Their involvement using the ICT has clearly brought out how the ICT impacted their work and improved their performance. Idris (2013) reported that information technology has opened up a new era in managing information and communication through the techniques of automation and this has enhanced the secretarial profession. This emergence has also made the secretarial job more competitive. From the findings it is believed that secretarial functions nowadays cannot be carried out properly without ICT. Therefore, the significance of ICT to the secretarial profession cannot be under estimated. In today's world, the application of ICT in the form of emerging technologies have drastically changed the working environment in the developed countries and is now changing the working environment in the developing nations (Ogunsola & Hezekiah, 2005)

The significant part that these changes affect in both the developed and developing nations is information management as regards to Oigusolaand Hezekiah's

view, therefore, the attention of this paper was drawn to the most fundamental elements that characterized the work of the secretary which in summary is the processing and handling of information (Adebayo & Akinyele, 2012). In this regard, findings have revealed that Malaysian secretaries are always striving to exploit the opportunities offered by ICT in the execution of their secretarial practice. The secretaries have realized a significant advantage by operating in the space provided by ICT opportunities which helped to make them relevant in their places of work (Richard, 2007). This action has brought out how the secretaries performance was improved by using the office technology as a tool in the execution of their tasks.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has discussed the duties of the secretary with regards to looking at ICT as the tool used by the secretary to perform his work. The objective of the paper is to investigate and discuss the performance of the secretary using the office technologies. The aim is to motivate the secretaries to continue to give their contributions by doing more to their organisations. This action will make the secretaries to be relevant in their organisations and will create job security for the secretaries. Literatures reviewed in this paper were centred towards identifying the relevance and how ICT supports the secretary in the execution of tasks with a view of identifying how these technologies assist in improving the secretary's performance for maximum service delivery.

However, findings in this study has revealed that:

1. The use of various forms of ICT software has significant impact on the general performance of the secretaries. This has indicated that ICT has tremendously influence on the general performance of the secretary.
2. The secretary needs periodic raining on office automation technologies so that he or she will be up to date with the emerging advancements of office technologies. This is important because frequent changes and advancement of technology in the modern office climate has compelled the need for training and re-training of staff. This necessitated the need for the secretary to be supported and motivated in order to assume positive changes from the impacts of the training received.

In order for the secretary to remain relevant in the office, a regular training and re-training is desirable. Areas that this training could involve which this paper recommends are general office automation software, public relations, time management, communication skill as well as editing and proofreading of documents skills. Secretaries should fully be involved to participate in managing the secretarial affairs of their organisations. They should be allowed to organize and manage meetings. Cover the meetings by taking minutes and participate fully in all the organisational affairs that relate to secretarial services in the organisation.

This will surely impact on their performance and optimal utilisation and will also ginger the secretary to stand-up to the demands of the present office environment requirements.

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