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# Modern Office Technology and the Performance of the Professional Secretary in Contemporary Organisations in Ghana

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**Abstract**
The Secretary plays a very important role in the efficiency of an organization. The effectiveness of these functions depends largely on the availability, the needed competencies and skills acquired by the secretary in the Modern Office Practice. This study examines the effects of modern office technology on the performance of office secretaries in the Upper West Region of Ghana. To achieve these objectives, both descriptive and non parametric analysis were employed in the study. The non parametric technique used was correlation analysis. The descriptive tools used were tables, means and standard deviations. Simple random sampling was used to collect primary data. Both questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. The findings of the study revealed that knowledge on use of office equipment contributed positively to productivity. This is reinforced by the percentages, mean and standard deviations. It was also established that office gadgets availability had no relationship with its knowledge. The percentages, means and standard deviations also reinforce this claim. The study thus recommends that training programmes on the use of modern office equipment for secretaries should be embarked upon.
**Key words:** Modern office, technology, secretary, productivity

## 1. Introduction

Several changes have taken place in private and public offices as regard the roles and functions of the secretary. The type of machines and gadgets that were used to produce, duplicate and store information has undergone a great transformation to cope with the fast growing world of technology. The success of any organization relies much on the secretary whose role though supportive is critical to the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

In today's organizations one of the things that make organizations unique is the use of modern technological gadgets. Both internal and external forces such as market competition, consumer behaviour, technology and quality management are the drivers of organizational change In today's business world, every office requires facts and accurate information for quick decision making (Akpomi and Ordu, 2009). In Modern Office Technology the role of the secretary is crucial in the life or progress of an organization hence, needs some technological and human backing from the work place. The effective performance of the Professional Secretary depends upon the office equipment, knowledge and skills, of Professional Secretary.

The skill level and functioning of the traditional secretary involve greater physical and mental ability. The introduction of modern technologies and programmes has lessened the onerous tasks for the modern secretary. These range from production, reproduction, storage and retrieval among others.

With this advancement of technology, the use of the computer and software programmes facilitates the work of the professional secretary. These include the use of machines such as printer, fax, pen drive, cell phones, photo copier, telex and internet. These requisite knowledge and skills make the position of the secretary rather challenging. With the improvement in technology and recent development in office, it is envisaged that the work of the secretary will be easier.

However, these new developments brought by technological challenges require even more knowledge and skills beyond being a professional secretary. For the secretary to be abreast with the changing times, face the challenges and overcome the old ways of doing things she or he needs training requirements in recent times to help meet organizational objectives.

Information technology have affected many professions in recent times. The roles of secretarial professionals have been turned around by technology. It has provided the tools that shift the role of secretaries from that of information recorders to business strategists (Adedoyin, 2010; Appah and Emeh, 2011 and Jaiyeola, 2007). Several other authors are of the view that the secretary has to be well equipped to meet the present challenges of a modern office. There are conclusions by experts in the secretarial profession that there need to be changes that will reshape the office (Boladele, 2002; Onifade, 2009; Igbinedion, 2010).

The objectives of the study are to establish the level of availability of modern office gadgets. It also measures the

 

knowledge and usage of office equipment and their impact on productivity.
The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 is the review of related literature. Following that is the methods and material in section 3. The next is section 4 which contains results and discussion. Finally, Section 5 is the conclusion to the study.

## 2. Literature Review

The term "secretary" is another term that has a wide meaning and it is important to appreciate the various meanings associated it. According to Whitehead (1994), the secretary is usually thought to be a person who takes dictation from a manager or other senior members of staff and turns the notes into typed correspondence. The term means all sorts of things for many people and certainly many of those who work in offices choose to be under the secretarial umbrella (Harding 1994).
As noted by (Edwin, 2008), the roles of secretaries in contemporary times have changed tremendously from the traditional roles. They have access to modern office technology such as the internet, intercom and fax. These technologies make work much easier. Dulek and Fielden (1999) also noted that it is easier to send messages using telex, electronic mails, fax and telephones. He noted that the era of computers and information technology helps users to write and edit and send memos, letters and reports. According to Duniya (2011) , modern day offices are equipped with technologically sophisticated gadgets that informs accuracy and efficiency of work output.
Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is concerned with managing and processing information. This is made possible through the use of electronic computers and computer software to manage information (Okute, 2001). According to Atakpa (2010), secretarial functions the world over have undergone tremendous technical transformations. He noted further that secretarial functions which were previously done manually have been mechanized. On the other hand, Okwuanaso and Obayi (2003) have noted that ICT has posed several challenges to secretaries in the execution of their duties. Supporting this claim, Eze (2000) asserted that any office staff of today that is lacking in Information Communication Technology would find work boring and uninteresting.
According to Nwaokwa and Okoli (2012), the introduction of ICT has changed the roles of secretaries. They opined that ICT has influenced the performance of secretaries in delivery of information, accuracy and effectiveness at the work place. Nonye (2013) researching into the need for capacity building of secretaries in modern office technology concluded that secretaries should be abreast of the use of modern office technology and recommended the need for periodic training programmes to be organized for secretaries to update their knowledge on modern office skills.
With modern office skills, words, sentences and paragraphs are manipulated. This is made possible using word processor. This makes possible all range of editing options applicable. This makes possibilities for deleting and inserting sentences before they are printed. Designing of documents, filling of forms, retrieving information and finally printing have become simplified tasks with the use of word processors (Agomuo, 2005; Azuka, 2007 and Nwosu, 2002). Examining the effects of information and communication technology on the performance of public sector secretaries, Buseni (2013) asserted that the quality of a secretary is a function of reliable and reporting framework. The study revealed that the use of computer, telecommunication and video techniques positively and significantly affected productivity of public sector secretaries.
Defining a computer, Oliver and Chapman (1993) espoused the functions in an office setting. They classified 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." They noted that these could be main computers, micro computers, main frame or super computers. The use of the internet enables information search and also sending of information using electronic mail.
As noted by Chukwumezie (2002) the skills needed by secretaries to manage information on the internet are keyboarding skills, grammatical and communication skills, computer fluency, operating the telephone and surfing the web. The rest are browsing the net offline and online and downloading and uploading the software. Furthermore, Uzoka (2002) defined information technology as the harnessing of electronic technology to improve the operations and profitability of the business as a whole. He noted further that information technology provides significant facilities such as word processing, filing and data management facilities.
Technological changes have tremendously transformed the traditional role of secretaries in 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 other office equipment that are available to the modern secretary

 

namely duplicating machines, dictating machines, printers and photocopy machines to mention a few. These technological advanced office equipment enhance proficiency and productivity (Apkomi, 2003).

## 3. Methods and Materials

The population comprised secretaries and offices in business organisiations in the Wa Municipality. The sample size for the study is 60 secretaries. This covered 45 public offices and 15 private business offices. These were randomly selected from the Wa Municipality in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The techniques used for data collection were questionnaires and interviews. The questions centered around the type and availability of modern office gadgets and their usage in relation to their impact on productivity. Both descriptive and non parametric tools were employed in the study. The non parametric technique used was correlation analysis. The descriptive tools used were tables, means and standard deviations.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Investigating the degree of association between the availability of selected office equipment and the secretary's level of knowledge has revealed plausible results. It was observed that all correlation coefficients were positive but low. The highest correlation was a printer with a correlation coefficient of 0.53 and significant at the 0.01 level. This was followed by the photocopier with a correlation coefficient of 0.29 and also significant but at the 0.05 level. The correlation coefficient for computer is very low at 0.09 and not statistically significant. This is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Correlation Analysis: Equipment Availability and Level of Knowledge

| Equipment | Correlation coefficient | Sig. |
|---|---|---|
| Computer | 0.09 | 0.466 |
| Printer | 0.53** | 0.000 |
| Photocopier | 0.29* | 0.028 |
| Pen drive | 0.124 | 0.362 |

Source: Authors' construct

Furthermore, analyzing the correlation that exists between the knowledge on office equipment and productivity, the correlation coefficients reveal that all coefficients are statistically significant and not very low. For knowledge on computer and photocopier use, the correlations were respectively 0.28 and 0.33 with productivity. This finding supports earlier studies such as Buseni (2013). These values were significant at 0.05 level. Meanwhile the correlation coefficients for Printer and Pen Drive with productivity were 0.48 and 0.54 respectively. These coefficients were however significant at the 0.01 level. These are shown in table 2.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis: Level of Productivity and Equipment Knowledge

| Equipment | Correlation coefficient | Sig. |
|---|---|---|
| Computer | 0.28* | 0.034 |
| Printer | 0.48** | 0.000 |
| Photocopier | 0.33* | 0.014 |
| Pen drive | 0.54** | 0.000 |

Source: Authors' construct

The availability of computers is the highest representing (91.1%). This is followed by printer representing (76.8%), slightly followed by pen drive (75%), photo copier (71.4%) and cell phone with (62.5%). The rest follow in order of decreasing value: internet facility (55.4%); manual typewriter (41.1%); fax machine (33.9%) and intercom facility (33.9%). Video techniques, projector and scanner are the least available representing (7.1%) and public address system also representing (5.4%). All the items in the table were below the mean range of 2.00 used for decision making. The values of the standard deviation are all below 0.5 except internet facility and this is an indication that the data set is not polarised. This is shown in Table 3.

 

Table 3. Availability of Equipment/Technology

| | Yes (%) | No (%) | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Computer | 91.1 | 8.9 | 1.09 | 0.288 |
| Printer | 76.8 | 23.2 | 1.23 | 0.426 |
| Electronic Typewriter | 33.9 | 66.1 | 1.66 | 0.478 |
| Photocopier | 71.4 | 28.6 | 1.29 | 0.456 |
| Pen Drive | 75.0 | 25.0 | 1.25 | 0.437 |
| Manual Typewriter | 41.1 | 58.9 | 1.59 | 0.496 |
| Cell Phone | 62.5 | 37.5 | 1.38 | 0.489 |
| Fax Machine | 35.7 | 64.3 | 1.64 | 0.483 |
| Internet Facility | 55.4 | 44.6 | 1.45 | 0.502 |
| Intercom Facility | 33.9 | 66.1 | 1.66 | 0.478 |
| Video Techniques | 7.1 | 92.9 | 1.93 | 0.260 |
| Projector | 7.1 | 92.9 | 1.93 | 0.260 |
| Public Address System | 5.4 | 94.6 | 1.95 | 0.227 |
| Scanner | 7.1 | 92.9 | 1.93 | 0.260 |

Source: Authors' Construct

On the level of knowledge in the usage of equipment, the study revealed that their knowledge and usage of the following is very high. Pen drive is the highest representing (32.2%), followed by manual typewriter with (25%). The rest follow in order of decreasing value: photo copier (23.2%); computer (21.4%); printer 19.6%); computer programmes (16.1%); internet facility (12.5%); intercom facility (7.1%); electrical typewriter (3.6%) and fax machines (1.8%). The knowledge and usage of Video technique represented (0%). The values of the standard deviation are quite high and this is an indication that the data set is scattered. Knowledge and usage levels of equipment are low except computer, printer, photo-copier and pen drive that represented high and very high. The mean range is below 2.00. These are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Level of Knowledge and Usage of Office Equipment

| | Very low (%) | Low (%) | High (%) | Very high | M | S D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Computer | 10.7 | 33.9 | 33.9 | 21.4 | 2.66 | 0.940 |
| Printer | 26.8 | 19.6 | 32.1 | 19.6 | 2.41 | 1.141 |
| Electronic Typ. | 51.6 | 17.9 | 16.1 | 3.6 | 1.59 | 1.092 |
| Photo copier | 26.8 | 21.4 | 26.8 | 23.2 | 2.43 | 1.173 |
| Fax machine | 51.8 | 17.9 | 21.4 | 1.8 | 1.59 | 0.968 |
| Internet Facility | 28.6 | 26.8 | 30.4 | 12.5 | 2.23 | 1.062 |
| Pen drive | 19.6 | 26.8 | 30.4 | 32.2 | 2.56 | 1.059 |
| Intercom facility | 44.6 | 19.6 | 21.4 | 7.1 | 1.77 | 1.095 |
| Video techniques | 69.6 | 10.7 | 12.5 | 0 | 1.29 | 0.780 |
| Manual typewriter | 35.7 | 17.9 | 17.9 | 25.0 | 2.25 | 1.283 |
| Computer Programs. | 26.8 | 28.6 | 19.6 | 16.1 | 2.25 | 1.268 |

Source: Authors' Construct

Among the responses on productivity level of equipment, photocopier was rated excellent which represented (39 %). Cell phone, pen drive, computer, manual typewriter and printer also followed representing the following percentages respectively: (33.9%); (30.6%); (30.4%); (23.2%) and (19.6%). The least represented is electrical typewriter with (7.1%). On the next rating scale, respondents rated computer and printer as good representing (57.1%). Pen drive, cell phone and photo copier followed with (41.6%), (41.1%) and (32.1%) respectively. The least is manual typewriter with (14.3%).

The next rating scale (satisfactory) indicated electrical typewriter (32.1%), manual typewriter (23.2%), printer and pen drive (21.4%), photo copier (19.6%), cell phone (16.1%) and computer (10.7%). No respondent rated

 

computer, printer and pen drive as poor which represented (0%). However, manual typewriter (28.6%) and electrical typewriter (23.2%) were the highest rated as poor respectively in productivity. Cell phone and photo copier also followed with (3.6%). Except computer, printer and pen drive, all the items were within the mean range with a total mean of 14.06 and grand mean of 2.00. The values of the standard deviation are far from the mean and this indicate that the data set is scattered. The productivity level of equipment is within excellent and good except for electrical and manual typewriters which represented satisfactory and poor respectively. This is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Contribution of Office Equipment to Productivity

| | Excellent (%) | Good (%) | Satisfactory (%) | Poor (%) | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Computer | 30.4 | 57.1 | 10.7 | 0 | 1.77 | 0.660 |
| Printer | 19.6 | 57.1 | 21.4 | 0 | 1.98 | 0.700 |
| Pen drive | 30.6 | 44.6 | 21.4 | 0 | 1.84 | 0.804 |
| Cell Phone | 33.9 | 41.1 | 16.1 | 3.6 | 1.88 | 0.974 |
| Electronic. Typewriter | 7.1 | 25.0 | 32.1 | 23.2 | 2.46 | 1.279 |
| Manual Typewriter | 23.2 | 14.3 | 23.2 | 28.6 | 2.36 | 1.394 |
| Photo copier | 39.3 | 32.1 | 19.6 | 3.6 | 1.77 | 0.953 |

Source: Authors' Construct

## 5. Conclusion

The availability and use of modern office equipment will inevitably affect the activities and output of the secretary in offices and business organizations. The availability of office equipment and knowledge in the use of office equipment is investigated vis-a-vis their effect on output in the office. The correlation coefficients, mean, standard deviations and percentages revealed that some office equipment contributed positively to output at varying degrees. The study established the wide usage of computers, printers and pen drives. Meanwhile intercom, video techniques and projectors recorded lower percentages. Also there existed positive and significant correlations between equipment availability and knowledge on one hand and knowledge of use and productivity on the other. The study thus recommends that training in the use of office equipment be intensified to increase the knowledge level of secretaries and subsequently their output.

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