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**Secretarial Education/Administration as a Tool for Conflict Resolution at All Level of Human Relationship**

**FRANCIS, U.U.**

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Department of Business Education  
Adeyemi College of Education Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria  
E-mail: [francisuche80@yahoo.com](mailto:francisuche80@yahoo.com), [ukaikeuchefrancis@gmail.com](mailto:ukaikeuchefrancis@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

This article focused on Secretarial Education/Administration as a Tool for Conflict Resolution at all level of Human Relationship. Invention of information and communication technologies have no doubt revolutionized secretarial education/administration, so much that secretarial profession has become more vast and demanding. We cannot deny the fact the conflict resolution is achieved when confidentiality is being uphold in any established, nation or the world at large. This paper reviews the concept of secretarial education, conflict resolution and goes further to examine how secretarial education can aid in conflict resolution, secretarial education in the past and present, the position of secretarial education and practice in Nigeria, relevance of secretaries in an organization, conflict resolution styles/strategies, conflict management and resolution, secretarial education and conflict resolution, secretarial education as an interface for interpersonal communication and conflict resolution, conclusion and recommendation.

**Keywords:** Secretarial Education, Conflict Resolution, Human Relationship

**Introduction**

Today, the secretarial profession has reached an advanced stage that the responsibilities of a secretary now extend to wider boundaries far beyond that of a mere copy typist, thus, secretary can be regarded as a worker who can be delegated with a greater and more complex responsibilities which include decision making on simple and complicated issues (Ugwu, 2009).

Abomi, (2002) defines a secretary as an assistant to executive, possessing mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, displays initiatives, exercises judgment and makes decisions within the scope of his or her ability. On the other hand according to Sani (2004), secretarial education/administration involves the process of guiding and initiating the learners to acquire the necessary skills, facts, knowledge, habits and attitudes that will make them co-exist with others as useful and productive members of the society, it is a

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programme of instruction designed to equip it recipients with knowledge and skills for gainful employment with knowledge and skills for gainful employment. Secretary being someone who is employed as a confidential assistant to an executive and performs other secretarial duties as well sees to the smooth running of the office. In view of this definitions and assertion about secretary and secretarial education, gives us a better lead to how secretarial education can contribute to conflict resolution.

Therefore, conflict by some school of thought is a structure of our society. This implies that, at all spheres of life and at all level of human relationship conflict is a bases, whether clearly noticed or by action or implied/conduct, attainment, class, position attained by an individual, groups or society is as a result of conflict to get there because of the fact that there are other contenders. Meaning that conflict is part of the human endeavour, life is full of contentions with other contenders, but the resolution side of it is when it comes with a negative effect, crisis, disagreements etc. Conflict resolution is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict. Often, committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the group (e.g., intentions; reasons for holding certain beliefs), and by engaging in collective negotiation.

Ultimately, a wide range of methods and procedures of addressing conflict exist, including but not limited to, negotiation, mediation, diplomacy, and creative peace building. The term conflict resolution may also be used interchangeably with dispute resolution, where arbitration and litigation processes are critically involved (Goldfien & Robbennolt, 2007). Furthermore, the concept of conflict resolution can be thought to encompass the use of nonviolent resistance measures by conflicted parties in an attempt to promote effective resolution.

**Secretarial Education in the Past and Present**

In the past decades, the traditional method of training for secretarial education throughout Nigeria was crude and primitive. It curriculum was poorly structured thereby confining its scope mainly to clerical services like; typewriting, audio typing and transcription, handling mails, receiving calls etc (Adelani, 2009). The earliest records of ancient civilization indicate that scribes were used by the Assyrians in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to compile materials for public reading. These scribes later became employees in the government circles and rose to a professional status. Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and with the invention of the typewriter, the duties of the scribes became more pronounced that more women were employed to produce the handwritten materials on

typewriters for record keeping and readable dissemination of information (Ukaike, 2012).

In the contemporary secretarial practice, the invention of information and communication technologies have revolutionized business and office services so much that secretarial profession has become more vast and demanding (Adelani, 2009). This assertion was corroborated by Oyeyiola, (2005) who also upholds the view while he posits that, the secretarial training that meets the contemporary demands of business world and the challenges of the work environments is on the area of information/administration and communication, keyboarding, word processing and human relation skill. Therefore, the former inadequacies in scope and structure have virtually given way to well structured and co-ordinate programme of studies offered in colleges of education, universities and polytechnics throughout Nigeria.

Etonyeaku, (2010) postulated that modern office had rapidly changed as a result of office automation, which brought about new methods of carrying out functions performed by secretaries. According to him at the centre of the new trends in the office are the office information systems and these new trends in technological innovation place greater responsibilities on practicing secretaries, and prospective secretarial student to better develop themselves to keep abreast with the innovation.

### **The Position of Secretarial Education and Practice in Nigeria**

Secretaries occupy enviable positions in organizations due to their invaluable role towards the achievement of the goal of any organization vis-a-viz the national goal. A secretary to a large extent is the main backbone of every organization as no organization can function effectively without a secretary; hence secretarial services are very important in every organization or nation whether large or small. But the society does not seem to realize the importance of services perform by secretarial staff unless members of the society find themselves in an office that does not have a qualified secretary (Ajao, 2009).

It is not an overstatement to say that secretarial profession is the nerve centre to which business and other fields revolve. The secretarial profession occupies an indispensable link in the diversified daily activities of world enterprise. She is the public eye and the success or failure of any organization which implies that the daily world activity depends very much upon her performance in the work place.

He further stressed that the precise nature of secretarial services and its relationship to other organizational and managerial services is difficult to define. Consequently, it can be interpreted in widely different ways depending on the people concerned, the organizational circumstance and

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any other compelling factor. The fact remain constant that secretarial service are the nexus of all managerial and administrative activities since they involve largely information management, organizing planning, coordinating, controlling, retrieval, dispersal, preservation and feedback.

Thus, this indispensability of a secretary in any modern or ancient office makes the relevance of the secretary an ageless constant actor in any area of human endeavour, which conflict resolution is one, because secretarial services involve operating at managerial sphere of influence where the secretary is hand in glove with the executive in making managerial works successful through the provision of vital support services (Nwoye, 2002).

**Relevance of Secretaries in an Organization**

Secretaries play significant roles in both the private and public sectors of the economy. No organization can exist in isolation to achieve its set objectives. Therefore, organizations are involved in communication processes and procedures. Secretaries are the agents through which organizational communication processes are accomplished. From the day a decision is taken to set up any organization, secretaries are involved (Ajao, 2009).

**Conflict Resolution Styles/Strategies**

The dual model identifies five conflict resolution styles/strategies that individuals may use depending on their dispositions toward pro-self or pro-social goals.

1. **Avoidance Conflict Style Characterized by Inaction and Passivity:** Avoidance conflict style is typically used when an individual has reduced concern for their own outcomes as well as the outcomes of others. During conflict, these avoiders adopt a “wait and see” attitude, often allowing conflict to phase out on its own without any personal involvement (Bayazit & Mannix, 2003). Unfortunately, by neglecting to address high-conflict situations, avoiders risk allowing problems to fester out of control.
2. **Yielding Conflict Style in Contrast:** Yielding or “accommodating” conflict styles are characterized by a high concern for others while having a low concern for one’s own self. This passive pro-social approach emerges when individuals derive personal satisfaction from meeting the needs of others and have a general concern for maintaining stable, positive social relationships. When faced with conflict, individuals with a yielding conflict style tend to give into others’ demands out of respect for the social relationship

3. **Competitive Conflict Style:** Competitive or “fighting” conflict style maximizes individual assertiveness (i.e., concern for self) and minimizes empathy (i.e., concern for others). Groups consisting of competitive members generally enjoy seeking domination over others, and typically see conflict as a “win or lose” predicament. Fighters tend to force others to accept their personal views by employing competitive, power tactics (e.g., argue; insult; accuse; violence) that foster feelings of intimidation.
4. **Cooperation Conflict Style Characterized by an Active Concern for Both Pro-social and Pro-self Behavior:** Cooperation conflict style is typically used when an individual has elevated interests in their own outcomes as well as in the outcomes of others. During conflict, cooperators collaborate with others in an effort to find an amicable solution that satisfies all parties involved in the conflict. Individuals with this type of conflict style tend to be highly assertive and highly empathetic at the same time. By seeing conflict as a creative opportunity, collaborators willingly invest time and resources into finding a “win-win” solution. According to the literature on conflict resolution, a cooperative conflict resolution style is recommended above all others (Sternberg & Dobson, 1987; Jarboe & Witteman, 1996).
5. **Conciliation conflict style:** Conciliation or “compromising” conflict style is typical of individuals who possess an intermediate-level of concern for both personal and others’ outcomes. Compromisers value fairness and, in doing so, anticipate mutual give-and-take interactions. By accepting some demands put forth by others, compromisers believe this agreeableness will encourage others to meet half-way, thus promoting conflict resolution (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994).

### **Conflict Management and Resolution**

Conflict management refers to the long-term management of intractable conflicts. It is the label for the variety of ways by which people handle grievances, standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider being wrong. This ways include such diverse phenomena as gossip, ridicule, lynching, terrorism, warfare, feuding, genocide, law, mediation, and avoidance. Which forms of conflict management will be used in any given situation can be somewhat predicted and explained by the social structure or social geometry of the case (Bercovitch *et al.*, 2009).

Conflict management is often considered to be distinct from conflict resolution. In order for actual conflict to occur, there should be an expression of exclusive patterns, and tell why the conflict was expressed

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the way it was. Conflict is not just about simple inaptness, but is often connected to a previous issue. The latter refers to resolving the dispute to the approval of one or both parties, whereas the former concerns an ongoing process that may never have a resolution. Neither is it considered the same as conflict transformation, which seeks to reframe the positions of the conflict parties. Counseling when personal conflict leads to frustration and loss of efficiency, counseling may prove to be a helpful antidote. Although few organizations can afford the luxury of having professional counselors on the staff, given some training, managers may be able to perform this function. Nondirective counseling, or "listening with understanding", is little more than being a good listener, something every manager should be.

Sometimes the simple process of being able to vent one's feelings, that is, to express them to a concerned and understanding listener, is enough to relieve frustration and make it possible for the frustrated individual to advance to a problem-solving frame of mind, better able to cope with a personal difficulty that is affecting his work adversely. The nondirective approach is one effective way for managers to deal with frustrated subordinates and coworkers.

There is other more direct and more diagnostic ways that might be used in appropriate circumstances. The great strength of the nondirective approach (nondirective counseling is based on the client-centered therapy of Carl Rogers), however, lies in its simplicity, its effectiveness, and the fact that it deliberately avoids the manager-counselor's diagnosing and interpreting emotional problems, which would call for special psychological training.

Listening to staff and grieved party with sympathy and understanding is unlikely to escalate the problem, and is a widely used approach for helping people to cope with problems that interfere with their effectiveness in their place of work.

**Secretarial Education and Conflict Resolution**

A secretary is a warm, endlessly helpful, and understanding individual whose sole aim is to alleviate, solve or prevent problems, workload and upsets for her executive. And the fact about the place and office of secretary in all spheres of human endeavour cannot be over-emphasized. According to Ajoa (2009) who stressed that secretary's position is indispensable in any modern or ancient office and establishment.

Therefore, if the position of the secretary as a secretarial education graduate do not only end in paper work and office routine duties; one will

not be wrong if he says that, the secretary in keeping confidentiality and better information management can aid in conflict resolution. A secretary who has access to every information of any nation, establishment etc, because of their present in all settings, can cause conflict, and at the same time prevent it, by either giving out leading information to conflict or withholding valuable information, to let peace rain. This view is supported by Fadare, (2009) stressed that silence has the capacity to affect people for good or otherwise, silence used positively has other preventive and curative effects. For example organization's members who are capable of holding their tongues in aggravated moments of rage are able to stem crisis and conflict in their organizations or a nation at large.

Conversely, Fadare further reiterated that silence can inflict pain on others. It can cut as deeply as words, if not swords. We often realize how painful it is when we are given the silent treatment response. Silence can communicate scorn, hostility, coldness, insult, defiance and hatred, but can also communicate respect, reverence, meditation, contemplation, kindness and submissiveness.

Conflict resolution is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict. Often, committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the group (e.g., intentions; reasons for holding certain beliefs), and by engaging in collective negotiation. Ultimately, a wide range of methods and procedures or addressing conflict exist, including but not limited to, negotiation, mediation, diplomacy, and creative peace building.

The place of secretarial education in conflict resolution can be buttressed from this assertion by Ugwu, (2009) who sees secretary as the custodian of information and correspondence which comes in and goes out of the organization, it is within his power to expose vital information or not, which can breed conflict or resolve conflict in any setting. Causes of conflict can be linked to poor information management; therefore, he reiterated that the secretary must not allow correspondence or any information for that matter to be exposed to unauthorized person(s).

### **Secretarial Administration an Interface for Human Relationship /Conflict Resolution**

Secretarial administrative professional, acts as interface with the clients and other various administrative tasks, which are the integral part of secretary's responsibilities. A secretary who is the product of secretarial education is responsible for handling daily administrative operational needs. Wenbin, (2008) stressed that good human relationship and interpersonal communication is an important aspect of a person's

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character to develop. However, few people set aside adequate time and effort to improve upon this skill.

The way to ensure effective and better communication at all level of human relationship that propels national and international conflict resolution, organizational growth and development is through the use of 7C's of effective human relationship and interpersonal communication. According to Barnett, (2008) the tips which go to make the ideal relationship between the executives, clients, other team members general human race and the secretaries are essentially the 7C's in human communication and interpersonal communication. They are:

**Clarity:** Messages need to be clear and free from vague expressions if they are to be effective and construct national and organizational image. Secretary should ensure that her thoughts are structured and organized before she communicates them.

**Conciseness:** If a message must be read by busy people, make them brief. Say what you need to say straightforward while maintaining goodwill, one can also eliminate wordiness by substituting one word for wordy, and overused or hackneyed expressions.

**Concreteness:** A writer has a choice writing, to use concrete (specific) or abstract (vague) words. Both have a place in business and communication, which will either facilitate peace or resolve conflict when it arises. However, concrete terms are typically more accurate and, in most cases, more believable.

**Correctness:** Correctness in human communication includes spellings, grammar, punctuations, and formats. For spelling, punctuation, and grammar, the writer should keep a dictionary and a writer's guide within easy reach. Most argument is as a result of errors committed in communication, and the inability to accept fault and take correction, prolongs and give raise to conflict.

**Coherence:** Messages need to "hang together" ideas need to flow from one to the next through smooth transitions. This can be achieved by outlining messages, writing simple sentences and focusing each paragraph on one idea. One can also improve the coherence of messages through parallel structure, connecting words and phrases, and guide posts.

**Completeness:** Check to be sure that the message is complete. There is always a danger in giving and receiving half information. Have all the



information you need to ensure that the other person can do a complete job or make a reasonable decision have been included.

**Courteousness:** The message should be positive, building goodwill and focused upon the reader. Neutral languages should also be used; and watch gender specific language and also use proper titles. Applying this principle will avert conflict at all level of human relationship.

### **Conclusion**

Having established the above fact that secretarial education /administration had gone from the traditional method of training, and that secretarial education throughout Nigeria was crude and primitive. Its curriculum was poorly structured thereby confining its scope mainly to clerical services like; typewriting, audio typing and transcription, handling mails, receiving calls etc (Adelani, 2009) and the fact that Secretaries occupy enviable positions in organizations due to their invaluable role towards the achievement of the goal of any organization vis-a-viz the national goal.

It is also not an overstatement to say that secretarial profession is the nerve centre to which business and other fields revolve. She is the public eye and the success or failure of any organization which implies that the daily world activity depends very much upon her performance in the work place.

One can also not deny that secretary to a large extent is the main backbone of every organization as no organization can function effectively without a secretary; hence secretarial services are very important in every organization or nation whether large of small. But the society does not seem to realize the importance of the services perform by secretarial staff (Ajao, 2009).

Therefore, it spells doom for the society if the secretaries are not well prepared to be confidential indeed, secretaries no doubt are found in all ministries and parastatal, academic and non academic public and private setting, which further implies that if not well imbedded with the confidentiality culture will breed conflict. Confidentiality should be the motor of every professional secretary. It is on this note that the paper recommends.

### **Recommendation**

The following are the recommendations:

- (1) That the society should debunk this feeling and idea that secretaries are only limited to office paper work, because of the fact that the

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secretary in the contemporary world, according to Ugwu, (2009) is a custodian of information and correspondence which comes in and goes out of the organization, it within his power to expose vital information or not, which can breed conflict or resolve conflict in any setting.

- (2) That Secretarial education curriculum should be structured, to include course on conflict resolution, confidentiality and human relationship, since according to Sani, (2004) secretarial education is involved the process of guiding and initiating the learners at acquire the necessary skills, facts, knowledge, habits and attitudes that will make them co-exist with others as useful and productive members of the society, it is a programme of instruction designed to equip it recipients with knowledge and skills for gainful employment with knowledge and skills for gainful employment.
- (3) It is important that both practicing and prospective secretaries should see themselves as people who can make things happen in the society, thereby redesigning their own image in their own mind first. This could be referred to as self rebranding.
- (4) That secretaries should personally put effort in developing a good interpersonal communication skill and a high degree confidentiality treat.

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