

A Futuristic View of the Secretarial Profession from an Artificial Intelligence Perspective

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Abstract - The first revolution in the 18th century saw the harnessing of water and steam power, exploitation of electricity took place in the second revolution and the exploitation of computer science technology in the third revolution. The fourth and fascinating revolution has started with the advent of new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning and Robot Process Automation (RPA). The above disruptive technologies significantly disrupt the role of a company secretary. A day is not far when Artificial Intelligence is also sitting in the boardroom along with other human Directors. New technology will increasingly change the way the companies work and also the work as a company secretary and governance professional. Technological innovation leads to new corporate governance challenges in terms of ethics, fairness and transparency. The changes need to be embraced with boards and stakeholders suitably advised.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Secretary, Machine, Company.

1. Introduction

The term 'Secretarial Practice' has been used to include procedure, knowledge, methods and skills of work to be performed by a private secretary or office assistant. Persons with secretarial skills find employment in all types of offices e.g., public, private, government and different types of agencies etc. located in small and big cities. The application of modern technology advancements has brought a revolution and greater effectiveness in day to day working of offices. Due to this, procedures have become more streamlined and office work has become more interesting and challenging [1]. What is commonly known in terms of secretarial practice is the typist grade, stenographer grade, receptionist, secretary, private Secretary (PA), and executive secretary. There is no any other hierarchy specified to the position of secretarial practitioners [1]. According to Adam [2] in an article which places much emphasis on secretarial practice, he noted that the secretarial profession has undergone tremendous changes in advancement of the way it used to be in the past due to the consistent improved technology. Due to the challenges faced by professionals and managers in the past, they try to shape or

position the roles and responsibilities of the secretarial title which has a lot of misconceptions [3].

Secretarial profession in the past used to be the possession of manual/electronic typing skill, shorthand with good conduct and character. But today, computers are in abundance which is common to majority of the people and also in offices [4]. The confusion people or other practitioners have about the concept of secretary ship is an illusion, in that, they assume that since majority of the working class use computers both at home and in their offices, this threatens or invades the work of a secretary. Another issue is the way most colleges and the universities design the secretarial programme. This may affect the credibility of those studying the secretarial course subjects that is, if not well designed with the necessary subjects to follow the modern trends of technology [4].

The secretarial role is a profession that demands skills that nobody else can have if you have never studied secretaryship, by way of practicing typing and shorthand. Typewriting skills as a field of study teaches students about how to type with speed and accuracy; how to type memos, letters, reports, tables etc; how to correct people or bosses written errors and mistakes, which has to do with comprehension, English grammar and spellings; should be able to identify people or bosses handwriting even if it is horrible to be read by any other person; adhering to all the standards and practices under the typewriting skills such as paragraphs, spaces, designs of business letters, creative typing, clear and admirable presentation of work; punctuation; and many more [5].

2. Overview of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the intelligence demonstrated by machines, unlike the natural intelligence displayed by humans and animals, which involves consciousness and emotion. The distinction between the former and the latter categories is often revealed by the acronym chosen. 'Strong' AI is usually labeled as artificial general intelligence (AGI) while attempts to emulate 'natural' intelligence have been called artificial biological intelligence (ABI). Leading AI textbooks define the field as the study of "intelligent agents": any device that perceives its environment

and takes actions that maximize its chance of achieving its goals [6]. Colloquially, the term "Artificial Intelligence" is often used to describe machines that mimic "cognitive" functions that humans associate with the human mind, such as "learning" and "problem solving" [7].

As machines become increasingly capable, tasks considered to require "intelligence" are often removed from the definition of AI, a phenomenon known as the AI effect. A quip in Tesler's Theorem says "AI is whatever hasn't been done yet." For instance, optical character recognition is frequently excluded from things considered to be AI, having become a routine technology [8]. Modern machine capabilities generally classified as AI include successfully understanding human speech, competing at the highest level in strategic game systems (such as chess and Go), and also imperfect-information games like poker, self-driving cars, intelligent routing in content delivery networks, and military simulations [9].

Artificial Intelligence was founded as an academic discipline in 1955, and in the years since has experienced several waves of optimism, followed by disappointment and the loss of funding (known as an "AI winter"), followed by new approaches, success and renewed funding [10]. After AlphaGo defeated a professional Go player in 2015, Artificial Intelligence once again attracted widespread global attention. For most of its history, AI research has been divided into sub-fields that often fail to communicate with each other. These sub-fields are based on technical considerations, such as particular goals (e.g. "robotics" or "machine learning"), the use of particular tools ("logic" or artificial neural networks), or deep philosophical differences. Sub-fields have also been based on social factors (particular institutions or the work of particular researchers) [11].

The traditional problems (or goals) of AI research include reasoning, knowledge representation, planning, learning, natural language processing, perception and the ability to move and manipulate objects. AGI is among the field's long-term goals. Approaches include statistical methods, computational intelligence, and traditional symbolic AI. Many tools are used in AI, including versions of search and mathematical optimization, artificial neural networks, and methods based on statistics, probability and economics. The AI field draws upon computer science, information engineering, mathematics, psychology, linguistics, philosophy, and many other fields [12]. The field was founded on the assumption that human intelligence "can be so precisely described that a machine can be made to simulate it". This raises philosophical arguments about the mind and the ethics of creating artificial beings endowed with human-like intelligence. These issues have been explored by myth, fiction

and philosophy since antiquity [13]. Some people also consider AI to be a danger to humanity if it progresses unabated. Others believe that AI, unlike previous technological revolutions, will create a risk of mass unemployment [14].

In the twenty-first century, AI techniques have experienced a resurgence following concurrent advances in computer power, large amounts of data, and theoretical understanding; and AI techniques have become an essential part of the technology industry, helping to solve many challenging problems in computer science, software engineering and operations research [15].

3. Does the rise of Artificial Intelligence mean the downfall of human civilization?

AI is a threat or not is still debatable. AI created machine and robots are used in a wide range of fields including health care, robotics, marketing, business analytics and more. There are two views to this debate-one is that AI when it reaches its full potential will make people redundant and create a gross imbalance in employment and second, AI will completely and efficiently transform the ability of human-professionals, companies to get things done [16]. There are mixed views and opinions on the benefits AI have within our everyday lives, particularly our workspaces and which tasks would become the function of AI. According to previous studies, AI will have an overall positive effect on our lives, both personally and professionally [17].

Due to advancement in AI and robotics, machines will efficiently and quickly perform more mundane and time-consuming tasks, thus allowing professionals to take up more innovative job roles. Companies would hire more highly skilled people to invent, develop, and maintain allied and complementary products [18]. Further, AI can predict and only provide evidence, facts and perform highly repetitive tasks but not judgements and it is difficult for a human to rely on their judgements for making decisions. Tasks demanding high degrees of creativity, empathy, persuasion, an understanding of which knowledge to apply in which situation to reach a productive decision would be difficult to automate. Hence, it doesn't seem possible to replace human brains [19].

4. What lies next for secretaries in the presence of Artificial Intelligence?

This question perfectly makes sense towards the huge transformation that is happening across the world due to massive breakthrough of technological intelligence in the human life. With growing digitalization and free flow of information, the society has seen many changes in the past few decades [20]. Our interactive smart phone devices, tablets,

Google Assistant and Amazon's Alexa are the examples of such technology breakthroughs made possible through Big Data, Machine learning and Artificial Intelligence programs. Manufacturing industries are using such high-end information technologies to create competitive advantage by introducing smart ways to operate their production units on the basis of recorded data instances [21]. Automation in production units, logistics firms, advanced robotics and self-driven cars are the results of Machine learning and Artificial Intelligence technologies. In such a scenario, it becomes an imperative for all professionals to understand this era of change and accordingly get ready for the future [22]. Being identified as Key Managerial Personnel, Company Secretaries play a pivotal role to ensure that company pursues a highly ethical code of conduct and its Board is able to implement and maintain a transparent corporate governance mechanism. With the passage of time, the role of a Company Secretary has grown many folds since it was first introduced and now while most countries have already paved a path for going digital, the existing conventional definition of the profession of company secretaries will also take new dimensions [23].

5. How well current company secretaries are placed among the fast changing business scenarios

Observing from a traditional approach, Company Secretaries are said to be the custodians of all important information and have a diversified role. Company secretaries are responsible for implementing corporate governance and abiding by laws and regulations of the state. However, in technology driven time the powers of Company Secretaries to control all important information within an organization is diluted due to changing information flow systems. It is therefore feasibly not possible to control everything in the organization especially the flow of information to the Top management i.e. Board of Directors [24]. Business leaders have gone tech-savvy and now do not generally depend on others to access information. They have marked their reach to high-end business analytics platforms and automated compliance systems and hence instead of relying solely on any professional, they are able to do their own research on the business problems and accordingly make their views [25].

In such a situation, with rapid involvement of AI and Machine learning in business decision making field, company secretaries should realize that they need to be very attentive of what is happening in their organization and what is being circulated to their Board of Directors. Company secretaries should take more interest in the use of data and information services through which major decisions are being taken in company and at board meetings so that while any decision is stuck somewhere, they are able to pass on their expert advice to the directors [26].

6. Can Artificial Intelligence replace a Company Secretary on Board?

To imagine a Robot in board room may seem funny but is equally possible too. AI powered robots are already being used in various industrial units and logistics firms to perform routine tasks. Hence, it is very much possible that these robots are trained with all routine tasks that company secretaries do such as recording of minutes, filing routine compliances, maintaining checklists, compliance management with respect to various laws applicable to a company, automating corporate communications sent to the board etc [27]. All is possible but still it would be wrong to say that automation would swipe away the jobs of company secretaries as machines are machines and they would not be able to give particular inferences on critical instances and cases based on the specific past experiences and human expertise.

In such a view, it is advisable that company secretaries should be future ready to embrace AI with respect to their roles and overall organization structure. Learning the news things would be the key to success. Specially, junior level company secretaries who mainly handle routine administrative work should invest their time towards learning about new concepts and how they can transform their existing knowledge base and abilities [28].

7. What would be the key skill of Company Secretaries in Artificial Intelligence-driven organizations?

Continuous Learning will be the key skills for all. Apart from corporate laws, tax, finance etc., Company Secretaries should also focus on understanding their company and the industry in which it operates. It is important to understand that how the changing dynamics of industries are bringing a shift in the way human capital is being planned across various organizations [29]. On the Administrative front, Government also aims to establish AI driven systems that are able to predict frauds and anomalies in corporate compliances and information submitted to the Regulators. Having good understanding about working of these technologies would be necessary for professionals in order to work with highest care and transparency on regulatory matters [29].

8. Future of Company Secretary in Artificial Intelligence-driven Companies

Due to innovative developments in Governance ecosystem and legal technology, the role of a company secretary is undergoing a major transformation. It is certain that things will be different in the future than they are now. Secretaries should not be unsettled by technological innovation, rather, plunge in and learn as much as possible about expanding technologies. It is imminent to learn about

algorithms, Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, blockchain, or augmented reality, remain updated and to always be a student of their profession [30]. Technological changes shall allow company secretaries to spend fewer time on data processing and more time on creative thinking and problem-solving, as a company secretary is a vital link between the company and its Board of Directors, shareholders, government and regulatory authorities. He ensures that Board procedures are both followed and regularly reviewed. He is key managerial personnel and commands senior position in the value chain and acts as conscience seeker of the company. He advises on good governance practices to the board and compliance of Corporate Governance norms as prescribed under Company, Securities and Other Business Laws and regulations and guidelines made there under [31].

9. Conclusion

Amplifying Human Intelligence with Artificial Intelligence has tremendous potential for developing a civilization like never before. With the increasing time, AI is rising and having more impact on how people work, live, and more. The continuous development of AI is covering all possible domains in the market, including web services, email communications, etc. Due to advanced developments in the Governance ecosystem and technology, the role of a company secretary is also experiencing a major transformation. Company Secretaries and AI-driven technology claims that things will be quite different in the coming future.

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