

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL SECRETARIAL COMPETENCIES FOR ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

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Abstract

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, the role of professional secretaries has evolved significantly, transforming them into indispensable assets for organizational success. As businesses strive for increased efficiency and competitiveness, the need for competent and skilled secretaries has become paramount. This paper aims to explore the importance of developing the competency of professional secretaries to facilitate organizational growth. The primary objective of this paper is to look into the key competencies required for modern professional secretaries and how these competencies contribute to the overall growth and success of organizations. Ultimately, this paper offers invaluable insights to organizations seeking to maximize their potential for growth by harnessing the capabilities of their professional secretaries. The outcomes of this paper will inform managerial decisions on workforce development, human resource planning, and talent management, providing a framework for nurturing a pool of competent and dynamic secretaries who can adapt and thrive in the ever-changing corporate landscape.

Key words: *Competency, Professional Secretary, Organizational growth*

Introduction

In the contemporary business world, organizations face relentless pressures to remain competitive, adaptive, and efficient to thrive in the dynamic global market. To navigate these challenges successfully, companies must invest in their human capital and recognize the pivotal role of professional secretaries in achieving organizational growth. Gone are the days when secretaries were solely responsible for administrative tasks; they have now evolved into strategic partners who play a vital role in ensuring smooth operations and enhancing overall efficiency.

The significance of professional secretaries in the modern workplace cannot be underestimated. They serve as the backbone of any organization, providing critical support to executives, managers, and entire teams. With their diverse skill set and adaptability, secretaries have expanded their scope to become key facilitators of effective communication, technology management, decision making, and project coordination within the organization.

The development of competency in professional secretaries is not only a pathway to organizational growth but also an investment in the future sustainability and success of the business. As the workplace continues to evolve, organizations that recognize the value of their secretaries and invest in their skills development will undoubtedly be better equipped to face the challenges of tomorrow's competitive landscape.

Concept of Developing Competency on Professional Secretaries for Organizational Growth

The concept of "developing competency on professional secretaries for organizational growth" revolves around the idea that professional secretaries play a crucial role in the success and growth of modern organizations. As businesses strive to remain competitive in the ever-changing corporate landscape, it becomes essential to recognize the value of competent secretaries and invest in their skill development.

However, it must be noted that competency development is an ongoing process. Organizations must foster a culture that values continuous learning and encourages secretaries to update their skills to stay relevant in a fast-paced business environment.

Who is a secretary?

Adegbenjo, (2023) stated that a Secretary is an executive assistance who possesses a mastery of office skills, demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, exercises initiative and judgment; and makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority.

Also, a secretary is a professional who provides administrative and support services to individuals, teams, or organizations. Historically, the role of a secretary was primarily focused on managing correspondence, organizing meetings, and handling administrative tasks. However, over time, the role has evolved to encompass a broader range of responsibilities, making secretaries essential members of modern workplaces.

Duties of a secretary

Olubato, (2020) A thorough review of the duties and roles performed by secretaries requires a classification or categorization of functions. This classification allows a better understanding of the job the secretaries performed.

These duties includes

- **Administrative Support:** Secretaries assist in managing and organizing administrative tasks, such as scheduling appointments, managing calendars, and handling phone calls and emails.
- **Correspondence Management:** They are responsible for drafting, editing, and proofreading documents, letters, memos, and reports on behalf of their superiors or the organization.
- **Communication Coordination:** Secretaries play a crucial role in facilitating communication within the organization, ensuring effective information flow among different departments and teams.
- **Meeting and Event Coordination:** They arrange and coordinate meetings, conferences, and events, ensuring all necessary arrangements are in place.
- **Data Management:** Secretaries may be responsible for maintaining and

organizing data and records, both in physical and digital formats.

- **Technology Management:** They are often proficient in using various office software and tools, including word processing, spreadsheets, presentation software, and email systems.
- **Travel Arrangements:** Secretaries may be involved in making travel arrangements, including booking flights, hotels, and transportation for their superiors or colleagues.
- **Project Support:** They provide support in managing and coordinating projects, including tracking progress, communicating updates, and organizing project related documentation.
- **Confidentiality and Discretion:** Secretaries often handle sensitive information and must maintain a high level of confidentiality and discretion.

The Competencies Needed by the Secretary for Organization Growth

According to Farotimi (2021), Competency is the capability of applying or using knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics to successfully perform a task.

He further states that to drive organizational growth effectively, professional secretaries need to possess a diverse set of competencies that go beyond traditional administrative skills. These competencies enable them to take on more strategic roles within the organization and contribute to its success.

Here are some essential competencies needed by secretaries for organizational growth:

- **Communication Skills:** Ikelegbe (2005), posit that Secretaries must have strong written and verbal communication skills to interact effectively with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders. Clear and concise communication is crucial for conveying information, handling inquiries, and representing the organization professionally.
- **Adaptability and Flexibility:** The modern business landscape is dynamic and constantly changing. Secretaries must be adaptable and flexible in handling shifting priorities, new challenges, and unforeseen situations.
- **Problem Solving Abilities:** Competent secretaries should be skilled problem solvers, capable of identifying issues and finding effective solutions. Their ability to troubleshoot and think critically contributes to smoother operations and improved decision making.
- **Technology Proficiency:** Kawonise (2005), notes that as organizations embrace digital transformation, secretaries must be proficient in using various office software and technology tools. These may include word processing, spreadsheets, project management software, and communication platforms.
- **Time Management skills:** Effective time management is crucial for

secretaries to handle multiple tasks efficiently, meet deadlines, and prioritize activities based on their importance and urgency.

- **Organizational Skills:** Competent secretaries should be highly organized, capable of managing calendars, scheduling appointments, and maintaining records systematically.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** Building positive relationships with colleagues, clients, and external stakeholders is essential. Secretaries with strong interpersonal skills can foster collaboration and effective teamwork.
- **Initiative and Proactivity:** Taking initiative and being proactive in anticipating the needs of executives and the organization helps secretaries stay ahead and be prepared for any challenges that may arise.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** In diverse workplaces, cultural sensitivity is vital for secretaries to communicate and collaborate effectively with colleagues and clients from different backgrounds.
- **Confidentiality and Ethics:** As secretaries often handle sensitive information, maintaining confidentiality and adhering to ethical standards are critical to building trust and integrity within the organization.
- **Project Management Skills:** Developing project management skills enables secretaries to assist in coordinating and tracking projects, ensuring timely completion and successful outcomes.
- **Continuous Learning:** Being committed to continuous learning and professional development allows secretaries to stay updated with industry trends and best practices, making them valuable assets to the organization.

Contribution of Secretaries Competency to organizational growth

Ugwu (2009), states that the society in which we live today is made up of institutions and organizations. These organizations and institutions can be business inclined or nonprofit oriented.

She states further that the organizations and institutions needs supporting staff to be able to function effectively, one of the most indispensable supporting staff members needed by Management of every organization is the secretary.

Some of the contributions of a secretary to organization growth are as stated below:

- **Enhanced Efficiency and Productivity:** Competent professional secretaries possess the necessary skills and knowledge to efficiently manage administrative tasks, handle communications, and organize information. This increased efficiency translates into improved productivity across the organization as they support executives and teams in their day to day operations.
- **Effective Time Management:** Professional secretaries who are competent in time management can help executives and managers prioritize tasks,

schedule meetings, and ensure that important deadlines are met. This enables the organization to make the most of its resources and seize opportunities promptly.

- **Streamlined Communication:** Oluga (2002), states that competent secretaries play a crucial role in managing communication channels both written and oral communication within and outside the organization. They can ensure smooth flow of information, facilitate effective communication between departments, and help prevent misunderstandings or miscommunications.
- **Optimal Resource Allocation:** By efficiently managing resources such as office supplies, equipment, and budgets, competent secretaries can contribute to cost saving initiatives and ensure that the organization operates within its financial means.
- **Stronger Decision Making Support:** Well trained secretaries can assist executives in gathering information, conducting research, and preparing reports. This support equips leaders with the data and insights they need to make informed decisions, leading to better outcomes for the organization.
- **Improved Customer Relations:** Secretaries often serve as the first point of contact for clients, partners, and stakeholders. A competent secretary can create a positive impression and provide excellent customer service, enhancing the organization's reputation and fostering long term relationships.
- **Adaptive Problem Solving:** In the fast paced and dynamic business environment, unforeseen challenges can arise. A competent secretary is equipped to handle such situations with flexibility and adaptability, contributing to the organization's ability to navigate uncertainties effectively.
- **Increased Organizational Adaptability:** As secretaries grow in their competencies, they can take on more diverse responsibilities and adapt to changing organizational needs. This adaptability enables the organization to be more agile and responsive to evolving market conditions.
- **Talent Attraction and Retention:** Organizations that invest in developing the skills of their employees, including professional secretaries, create a positive work culture and demonstrate their commitment to employee growth. This, in turn, can attract top talent and promote employee retention.
- **Long Term Organizational Learning:** Developing competency in professional secretaries can lead to a culture of continuous learning within the organization. As secretaries acquire new skills, they can share their knowledge with colleagues, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

Challenges in accomplishing the competencies in organizational growth

According to Ihionkhan (2009), Developing competency in professional secretaries for organizational growth can be a challenging endeavor. While these competencies are essential for their success and impact on organizational growth, several obstacles may hinder the accomplishment of these competencies. These include:

- **Limited Training Opportunities:** Availability of comprehensive training programs tailored specifically for professional secretaries may be limited, making it difficult for them to access specialized learning and development opportunities.
- **Time Constraints:** Secretaries often have busy schedules and juggle multiple responsibilities. Finding time for training and skill development can be challenging, especially when urgent tasks demand their immediate attention.
- **Resource Constraints:** Small and medium sized organizations, in particular, may have limited resources to invest in training and development initiatives, hindering the secretary's ability to acquire new competencies.
- **Resistance to Change:** Traditional perceptions of the secretary's role as purely administrative may lead to resistance in accepting expanded responsibilities and embracing new competencies.
- **Lack of Support from Management:** The commitment of organizational leaders to invest in competency development for secretaries is crucial. If management does not recognize the value of such training, it can hinder the implementation of effective skill building programs.
- **Inadequate Technology Infrastructure:** A lack of access to the latest technology tools and software may hamper the development of technology related competencies required for modern secretarial roles.
- **Limited Collaboration Opportunities:** Opportunities for secretaries to collaborate with other professionals and gain exposure to strategic decision making processes may be restricted, limiting their ability to build essential competencies.
- **Lack of Recognition and Advancement Opportunities:** Secretaries may perceive a lack of recognition or career advancement opportunities even after acquiring new competencies, which can demotivate them from investing in skill development.
- **Resistance from Secretaries Themselves:** Some secretaries may be resistant to adopting new competencies or expanding their roles due to fear of failure or stepping outside their comfort zones.

Conclusion

This paper on developing competencies in professional secretaries for organizational growth has highlighted the critical role secretaries play in today's dynamic business environment. Once considered primarily as administrative support, modern professional secretaries have evolved into strategic partners who contribute significantly to the success and growth of organizations. Their expanded roles encompass communication facilitation, technology management, decision making support, and project coordination, making them indispensable assets for organizational excellence.

The key competencies identified for professional secretaries are vital for their effectiveness in contributing to organizational growth. Strong communication skills, adaptability, problem solving abilities, technology proficiency, and time management enable secretaries to excel in their roles and handle diverse responsibilities efficiently. These competencies not only enhance their individual performance but also foster a positive work environment, where collaboration and innovation thrive.

Recommendations

For proficient secretarial competencies vis à vis organizational growth, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Organizations should invest in comprehensive training programs tailored specifically for professional secretaries. These programs should focus on developing the key competencies identified, such as communication skills, technology proficiency, problem solving abilities, and project management skills.
2. Conducting regular competency assessments to identify the strengths and areas for improvement of professional secretaries: These assessments can help tailor training programs to individual needs and provide a roadmap for skill development.
3. Providing opportunities for secretaries to participate in mentorship programs as shadow executives and managers. Exposure to strategic decision making processes and collaboration with higher level professionals can enhance their competencies.
4. Acknowledging and rewarding secretaries who demonstrate growth in their competencies and take on additional responsibilities. Recognition can motivate them to continue investing in their professional development.
5. Ensuring secretaries have access to the latest technology tools and resources: Upgrading hardware and software can enhance their technology proficiency and enable them to contribute more effectively to the organization.

By implementing these recommendations, organizations can develop a highly competent and proactive secretarial workforce, poised to contribute significantly to organizational growth and success. Investing in the professional development of

secretaries not only enhances their individual capabilities but also fosters a culture of learning and continuous improvement throughout the organization.

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