Abstract

Secretarial Professionals are accustomed to handling crises of all shapes, sizes and intensity. However, the difficulties that they face are augmented when economic conditions worsen. The current economic recession has caused most organizations to review their allocations of resources more critically and as a result, organizations of varying sizes have come up with different stringent measures to cope with the recession. As Secretarial Professionals try to manage the situation and keep their subordinate engaged, motivated, and appropriately trained, they face many challenges including reduced human resources, programme funding, psychological hardships for workers dealing with the crisis, and subordinates with different generational mindsets and priorities. These and numerous other difficulties make it challenging for the Secretarial Professionals to not only manage themselves and the teams under them but also ensuring that the entire organizations are adequately managed throughout recessionary period and beyond. This paper will review the unique challenges the Secretarial Professionals face in managing themselves, their subordinate and the entire organization as a result of the economic recessionary conditions. It will also provide recommendations for striving and surviving the recession.

Introduction

The current economic recession has caused most organizations to review their allocations of resources more critically and as a result, come up with different stringent measures to cope with the recession. The measures resulted into psychological hardships for workers with different generational mindsets and priorities (Strebel, 2008) While Secretarial Professionals are accustomed to handling crises of all shapes, sizes and intensity, however, the challenges are augmented when economic conditions worsen.

These challenges are making it more difficult for Secretarial Professionals to manage themselves, lead and motivate the teams under them for optimum
The General Impact of the Recession

The economic recession brought sweeping changes across the country. Some changes brought about drastic policies affecting all cadres of employees by organizations (Fapohunda, 2012). Financially, it has lessened activities in the market which invariably has lessened the income for government all around. As a consequence, this has forced organizations to restrict their spending, particularly on office supplies, equipment, etc (Strebel, 2008).

Now, many people lost their jobs especially in the private sector and took any available position, even ones they were greatly overqualified. Others could no longer afford to retire. Training budgets degenerated and opportunities dried up. So encompassing was the economic climate, that no vocation was immune (Chidi 2015).

We have, however, come through the crisis, and now the economy is slowly healing (Eneji 2017). It is, therefore, important to understand the current state of the economy for the obvious reason that it has affected the services of the Secretarial Professionals. The Professional, therefore need to take proactive initiatives to acknowledge and understand the happenings in their organizations. This in a way, will chart the path which a Secretarial Professional takes.

Secretarial Profession In Economic Recession

Secretarial Profession “is not immune from rules of economics, particularly when it comes to issues of supply, demand and money because money is a key to resources” (Duncan 2012). In as much as Secretarial profession focuses more on supporting role, the economic side of it still does play a crucial role on how the Professionals manage themselves, lead and motivate others for optimal performance. The services the professional offered have been altered according to the events of the present (Watson 2010).

Secretarial professionals now struggle to obtain the resources they need to
effectively manage, lead and motive people in the workplace, and the difficulties that they face are augmented when economic conditions worsen. Much has changed for the Secretarial professionals, and in order to thrive in this new working environment, it is necessary for the professionals to operate wisely, using their knowledge to make the right decision regarding the right question at the right time.

**Effect of the Recession on Secretarial Professionals**

It is essential to look in depth on the effects the economic recession has on secretarial services. The Professionals should know and grasp the changes in today's workplace due to the recession which mostly affect the following areas:

- Larger workloads without staffing backups and single support professionals now juggled multiple managers;
- Direct in-the-line-of-fire contact with Management;
- Indistinct authority levels;
- The “Mind Reader” expectation; and
- The role of Intermediary (Acting as an “Alter Ego”)  (Chrissy,2012).

The involvement of Secretarial professionals in helping to create efficiencies and institute cost control measures in the business has also brought a unique challenges to the Secretarial Profession. These measures ranged from reviewing policies to ensure affordability, to implementing cost reductions, etc (Perrine, 2016).

The measures are focusing on the alignment or better alignment of secretarial profession with the business agenda. It would be easy to simply throw up one's hands and say, 'It's okay to just survive!' but we know that excellence goes far beyond the basics (Chrissy2012). We, therefore, need to understand the repercussions on the profession so as to prepare ourselves for the new challenges more so that the crisis provides opportunities for a shift towards greater inclusion, equity and social justice.

**Strategies for Self-Management, Leading and Motivating Others for Optimal Performance**

It is in this context that the traditional role of the secretarial professional is being given closer scrutiny. It is no longer a matter of recovering a genuine understanding of the role, and adapting these standards to a modern situation. Ours is an 'Age of Precision,' and much more is required. We should not be left out in the shift towards' common sense power' and creative leadership. That is the ability to respond to changes in business strategy, while operating with alertness, strategic competence, and global interpersonal skills for optimal performance.

Self-management means managing your thoughts and emotions. It is the ability to Use your passion and energy for work and also to be kind to others.
(Chrissy, 2012). For optimal performance in the recessionary period, a Secretarial professional, must know how h/she can manage h/herself. The Professionals should remember that, the career belongs to them and therefore 'Live it, be it, and own it!' Manage yourself before you start managing others. It only takes one person to make a BOLD difference in your career, and that person can be you! Ask yourself is it healthy? (Dickerson, 2012)

Personal style, professional judgment, self-management and compassion actually define the Secretarial Professional's character (Browne 2014). To help you get started, here are some tips of self-management (Chrissy, Joshi 2015, Bonnie, 2016):

- Face life's obstacles with a label of calm that is enviable
- Get into action to respond to a problem before giving yourselves time to dwell or worry too much
- Believe in your own abilities to the point that you feel comfortable handling whatever comes at you
- Focus on your strengths while managing your weakness
- Don't be afraid to take risk
- Enjoy challenging yourself and setting high goals
- Seek out self-improvement and opportunities
- Don't be afraid to admit when you make mistake
- Don't be afraid to acknowledge when you don't know something
- Be able to relate to customers or company members at any level of the organization
- Be honest about your shortcomings
- See problems as challenges to make your day more interesting
- Be a reliable judge of character and very loyal

Leading Others

Leading is defined as 'the influencing and directing of the behaviours of subordinates in such a way that they willingly strive to accomplish the goals and objectives of the business (Heinz et el 2008). Leadership also means the behaviour of an individual when he is directing the activities of a group towards a shared goal. Leadership is neither a rank nor a title. It is a choice. Leadership is the choice to provide care and protection for those for whom we are responsible.

Secretarial Professional as a Leader

Leadership is a real buzz word across the Secretarial profession at the moment. We are all leaders whether we have the title or not. We lead ourselves, our Executives and our colleagues at some point, to some degree, and on most days (Dickerson, 2016),

As a leader, the Secretarial Professional copes with change, tolerates
chaos, inspires others with great passion to offer their best efforts on behalf of a goal to which he/she and the Executive are personally committed. None of us can know it all. Our leaders need support teams who are ready, willing, and able to step up as leaders in order to bring order to the chaos that has become our global “new normal.” Do it because the most successful Secretarial Professionals who are also leaders wield power and influence (Sue France 2015; Dickerson 2016).

**Demonstration of Leadership**

To be a leader you must have an honest understanding of who you are, what you know, and what you can do. What is important is leading by example. It is what you do, not what you say, that demonstrates what you care about. If you want your staff (or subordinates, etc.) to show more consideration, you need to show more consideration to them. A big part of your responsibility, therefore, is to lead them with your own actions. When you lead by example, you create a picture of what is possible and you make it easy for others to follow you.

You also need to concentrate on how others may perceive you and develop the right image and appropriate behaviours so that others may want to follow you. If you are a 'leader', then you should also know that you have a responsibility to others. They look to you for guidance and strength; that is part of what being a leader is.

Carry your own weight. So often during difficult times, the leader is not the one who discards the weight of responsibility but carries it on his shoulders. Build strong relationships —when you have a good relationship with your staff, they'll feel more comfortable coming to you with problems and questions (Dickerson 2016; Bonnie, 2016).

Leaders know how to stand alone. When you exempt yourself from the bravery of the moment, you exempt yourself also from the honour that follows. Be a leader with a servant's heart. A leader with a servant's heart is not absorbed in centring the organization on his or her needs, but in being a facilitator in order to make those around him successful. Be accessible —this is a major reason why projects get off track: the leader simply isn't around to answer questions as they arise. Be a leader with an open mind. Martha Stewart said: 'Without an open-minded mind, you can never be a great success.' Leadership is not about position or skill. It is about attitude. The truth is that the best leaders desire to support others, not themselves.

**Successful Leaders:**

- Leave tracks
- Leave things better than they found them
- Share “lessons learned”
- Are visionary
- Have Passion and Purpose
Recognize need for effective succession planning through:
- Encouragement
- Education
- Sharing of knowledge

Have a clear vision.

Value their employees —

Foster collaboration

Share the role!

Above all, they recognized that the resources they need are already within them
(Mello, 2006; Simms, 2009; Dickerson, 2016; Bonnie, 2016).

**Motivating Others**

Motivation is a Latin word, which means to move. Koontz and O'Donnell (2014) define it as “a general term applying to the entire class of drives, desires, needs wishes and similar forces that induce an individual or a group of people at work.” It can also be defined as “a willingness to expend energy to achieve a goal or a reward. It is a force that activates dormant energies and sets in motion the action of people (Bates, 2009).

It is a process which starts with a physiological or psychological deficiency or need that activates or a drive that is aimed at a goal or incentive. It is the function that kindles a burning passion for action among the human beings of an organization (Koontz & O'Donnell, 2014).

Motivation can be positive or negative. Positive motivation means use of incentives - financial or non-financial confirmation, pay rise, praise etc. Negative motivation means emphasizing on penalties. It is based on force of fear - demotion, termination, etc.

**Secretarial Professional as a Motivator**

As a supervisor of other support staff, motivation is an important part of a secretarial professional's job. As a manager of a team, you know how important it is that the individuals on the team are all motivated, involved, and productive. The Professional needs to find a way to get the most from other employees and the executives themselves, keeping them on task and always striving for more. Building a positive work environment is very important because employees are more productive when they work in a good environment. When they're happy and satisfied, they work harder and are more productive.

**Strategies for a Secretarial Professional**

Some of the most common alternative approaches that will reap better rewards are:(Brenner, 2009; Perrin 2008; Burge 2016; Dickerson2016):
Introduce positive reinforcement - People are much more likely to strive for excellence when they believe their efforts are noticed and recognized. Work hand-in-hand with your employees to develop goals. Find out what their strengths and weaknesses are, and then involve them in the goal-setting process. Identify what is holding back poor performers and then find out what it will take to get them up to par. The downside of this is that sometimes an employee is just not a good fit for your organization.

Take the time to talk to each member of your staff individually. Find out what makes him or her tick, and then use this knowledge to push the right motivation buttons. Create good work environment - While very few employees in have turned down a pay increase, multiple studies have shown that a good work environment where employees are happy is a much better motivator than money. So focus more of your efforts on making sure you are creating a positive, supportive, enjoyable work climate for your employees.

Encourage risk-taking. Start with small things. Let your subordinates try different ways of doing their jobs. If it doesn't work, don't talk about failure — instead, discuss what was learned in the process. Make the activity more lovable. Find out what makes the activity annoying and then change how, when, where, or with whom it's done. For example, run with a friend, eliminate unnecessary interruptions, or find a tool that makes the task easier.

Make the result more lovable. Clarify the value – what is in it for you or anyone else? Or enhance the value with a reward or recognition. For yourself, that might mean promising a break when an unpleasant task is finished. For employees, that might mean helping them understand the importance of, and showing appreciation for, their contribution.

Examine and improve your communication process. To have a truly enthusiastic, productive team, you must create an environment of openness and sharing - Say "thank you": It's a great emotional lift when a person's work is recognized. Take the time to write a specific thank-you when employees go above and beyond or even just to show your appreciation that they have a great attitude. This can really put a smile on their faces and show that you really do notice and appreciate it.

Formally recognizing outstanding achievements on a regular basis is a great incentive. Sometimes the recognition alone is enough, but consider alternative rewards as well — just like leaving early for a day,

Caring - This is perhaps the most important characteristic - generate a tonne of goodwill, both toward yourself and the subordinate in general – Do not overwork.
Train, train, and train some more. Do not limit your thinking on training to the skill set needed to perform a specific job.

Conclusion
The economic recession has brought sweeping changes across the country affecting all cadre of employees, including the secretarial profession. Secretarial Professionals must bring innovation as they cope with these changes; deliver structure through the management of day-to-day routines; and provide Decision-making support by identifying and evaluating solutions to achieve common goals. It's essential, that we are equipping ourselves with the skills required to remain relevant in the future, not only for the sustainability of our own careers, but also for the benefit of the organizations in which we work. We should properly recognize our role as a collaborative business partnership, with higher levels of responsibility, including decision-making discretion. We are essential contributors because we serve as the liaison to Executives, and layers of the company, and who manage world-wide relationships.

Success is met when we exceed expectations; when we go the second mile, and when we work diligently to remain relevant and competitive. Thriving is where we find contentment, advancement and opportunity.

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