QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE SECRETARIAL PROFESSION: ITS ROLE IN NATION BUILDING

EHIDIAMHEN SYLVESTER
College of Education, Warri
Delta State

Abstract

Secretarial profession is a career with technical skill that helps to achieve standard when procedures are properly followed. The purpose to this paper is therefore, to highlight the Quality Assurance in the Secretarial Profession, its role in nation building. To achieve this, the secretarial profession needs to follow surgical process to arrive at it destination. This process is a means of re-branding the secretarial profession to meet this standard it requires like other professional bodies such as law, engineer, nursing etc.

Introduction

The secretarial profession is a career that combines scientific principles and technical skills to achieve quality assurance in the organisation. For a secretary to be effective within a dynamic complex organisation and help manager achieve outcomes, secretaries need to be knowledgeable, resourceful, and able to work well with other practitioners. This goal is achieved through the adherence of quality assurance in the secretarial profession in order to indentify who is a professional secretary. The professional body should set up an institution certifying who is a professional secretary and the institution be give the will power to sanction any secretary who compromise the quality of the professional ethics. The establishment of this institution shall differentiate those who are not professional from real professional secretary who will be the propeller of quality assurance of the profession.

According to Oniyama (2006) in Igwebuike (2010) quality assurance is refer to the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of a system to ensure that standards are being met. Ekhaguere (2005) see it by saying that quality is not same kind of fixed, immutable target or destination that may just be attained merely by striving sufficiently hard, but a dynamic or moving target whose attainment at each point in time is facilitated by a set of strategies that are also dynamic. Secretary education is one of the driving forces that help economy to boost youth empowerment and meaningful attained of the millennium development goals. All
these are possible through the articulated Secretarial Education programme in tertiary institution. Secretarial Education is a complex process of professional education given to intending secretaries to equip them with the skills, knowledge and competence to assist individual receive competitive knowledge and adequate or robust wealth of experience that will enable them become independent lifelong learners which they need to maintain their well being throughout life.

According to Houston and Howsam (1972) in Ihuama and Odionye (1993) said education is the vehicle for preparing those who wish to practise in the secretarial profession. As in all professions, this preparation involves on one hand, the acquisition of knowledge and the ability to apply it, and on the other development of the needed repertoire of critical behaviours and skills. Upholding the ethical, cultural and core value of the profession is a means of maintaining the quality assurance of the secretarial profession. A professional secretary needs to be mindful of ethical profession in other not to violate the expectation of the profession in the organisation.

The Concept of Quality Assurance in the Secretarial profession

Defining quality is difficult but the exercise of quality is an interaction process between customers and provider. Quality can be defined as the extent of resemblance between the purpose and the truly granted service as outcome of education (Wikipedia). In an economic dimension, quality is the extent of accomplished services by secretaries' concept of quality assurance (Wikipedia).

Also Quality Assurance is a system of measure and controls establishment within an organization to try and manage the quality of the goods or services being provided. Quality assures us a natural evolution of the more traditional “Quality control” which relied almost totally on end of line inspection to weed out and identify failure.

Quality assurance is the systematic measurement, comparison with standard, monitoring of processes and an associated feed-back loop that confers error prevention (Wikipedia). There are two principles included in the quality assurance. They are “Fit for the purpose”, the product should be suitable for the intended purpose. This means that for a secretary to be employed in the organisation, he or she must be suitable in rendering secretarial service.

“Right first time,” mistakes should be eliminated. Quality assurance includes management of the quality of raw materials, assemblies, products and components, services related production, and management, productions and inspection processes. Suitable quality is determined by product users, clients or customers, not by society in general.
Where did Quality Assurance come From?

Originated with American academic charged with rebuilding Japan after World War 2. People like Deming Juran and Crosby initialised improvement methodology's which later moulded together and became accepted as quality Assurance. In U.K. quality assurance is introduced through the development of the ISO (international Standard Organisation) 19001 standards and its approval scheme which was introduced into their business in 1990's.

Secretarial Profession and Quality Assurance

The term 'profession' is a group of people in a learned occupation, the members of which agree to abide by specified rules of conduct when practicing the profession. The concept of quality assurance relate to Secretarial profession is a dynamic process such that secretaries in both academic and administrative practice assumes accountability for quality of service they provide. The key word in this respect is accountability, standard and update of knowledge, skill and technical procedure. (George Veigas and Issac 1984) in Mgbekem and Sanson Akpan): It is a guarantee to the society that members of the secretarial profession are regulating services provided by secretaries Kozier (2004) define quality assurance as the defining of secretarial practice through well written secretary standards and the use of those standards as a basis for evaluating on improvement of secretary services.

Members of the profession with management responsibilities are oriented with the focused, ensuring their team's projects and tasks are performed efficiently, on time, and in a way that's consistent with specified objectives. Their long-term thinking often involves projecting how current efforts will extend into the future. Professionals charged primarily with leadership responsibilities are more externally connected, interacting with a broader and more diverse range of stakeholders from both inside and outside the profession or industry and scanning the larger environment for emerging trends and opportunities. Rather the Professionals see the emerging trends as variation or logical extension of the present that denotes invention that may require fresh thinking and innovative solutions which may sometime be different from current organizational norms.

The concept of quality assurance relate to Secretarial profession is a dynamic process such that secretaries in both academic and administrative practice assumes accountability for quality of service they provide. The key word in this respect is accountability, standard and update of knowledge, skill and technical procedure. (George veigas and Issac 1984) in Mgbekem and Sanson Akpan): It is a guarantee to the society that members of the secretarial profession are regulating services provided by secretaries Kozier (2004) define quality assurance as the defining of secretarial practice through well written secretary standards and the use of those standards as a basis for evaluating on improvement of secretary services. Members of the profession with management responsibilities are oriented with the focused, ensuring their team's projects and tasks are performed efficiently, on time, and in a way that's consistent with specified objectives. Their long-term
thinking often involves projecting how current efforts will extend into the future.
Professionals charged primarily with leadership responsibilities are more externally
connected, interacting with a broader and more diverse range of stakeholders from
both inside and outside the profession or industry and scanning the larger
environment for emerging trends and opportunities. Rather the Professionals see the
emerging trends as variation or logical extension of the present that denotes
invention that may require fresh thinking and innovative solutions which may
sometime be different from current organizational norms.

Secretarial Ethics

The Oxford Dictionary defined ethics as system of moral principles, roles of
conduct. Every profession has a code of ethics that govern the conduct of its
members in the dealing with one another and in their relationship with the outside
world. These ethics may be written or oral, but members are expected to observe it.
The secretarial profession like any other profession has its own ethics even those
some of these ethics are oral.

Professional Bodies

For secretarial ethics to remain undiluted by anybody there is need for a
professional body to filter the profession as to know who is regarded as a secretary
and who not. The body exercise power over who enter the profession and who
should not and sanction and defaulter as far as the profession is concern. This body is
back by law by virtues of being a chartered body and organised conference/seminar
for her members such as law, nursing, engineering, Nigeria institute of management
etc.

Association: This is an official group of people who have joined together for a
particular purpose, trade association, football association, NAPSSON etc. The
association have the right to gather whether registered or not discuss matter affecting
them, it involve in the training and retraining of her members.

Conferences: For a secretary to be regarded effective in carrying out
administrative function in the contemporary organisation, he/she needs to attend
seminar/conferences where erudite scholars will be present to bequeath on them the
knowledge they need to carry out their administrative work such as records
management, classification of records, handling of information and processing of
data.

Workshop on the Use of ICT:

Secretaries in a contemporary organisation require training in order to be effective
in the use of ICT in the organisation to help boast up the services of secretaries. Such
trainings are gotten through workshop organised by various bodies who are
specialist in the use of ICT. Through this workshops, the secretary will be acquainted
with the use of computer to browse internet so as to be current in globalisation era.
Approaches for Quality Assurance in Secretarial Programme

There are two major categories of approaches exist in quality assurance viz; General and Specific.

**General approach:** According to George et al (1988) the general approach involves large body's evaluation of persons or agency's ability to meet established criteria or standards at a given time in Nigeria. A typical case is that of NAPSSON that is an umbrella for all administrative secretaries in Nigeria. The National Association Professional secretarial staff of Nigeria is supposed to be agency that will establishes criteria or standards for secretaries training. It is responsible for credentialing, Licensure, Accreditation and certification.

**Credentialing:** This is generally defined as the formal recognition of professional or technical competence and attainment of minimum standards by a person,

- A produce a quality product
- B confer a unique identity
- C protect provider and public
- D control the profession (Boore 1993)

**Licensure:** This is a contract between the profession and the nation in which the profession is granted control over entry into and exit from the profession. The licensing process requires writing regulation to define the scope and limits of the professional practice (John 2007). But in practice, this is yet to be applied as there is no one organisation/Association signed out for that purpose. To achieve this it would result the difference Association to come to reaching on who to issue licence.

**Accreditation:** This is a one of the major quality assurance tool employed in secretarial profession. It is a system of evaluating secretary academic programmes in line with the minimum laid down standard. (Quiun et al 1997).

**Certification:** This is usually a voluntary process within the profession. A person's educational achievement, experience and performance on examination are used to determine the person's qualification for functioning in an identified speciality area.

**Special Approaches:**

Programmes that are offered in higher educational institutions should be qualitative for them to contribute meaningfully towards nation building. Bajah (1998) notes that the quality of any education is judged by the effect, which it has on learners and society. The goals of education in the National Policy are:

(a) the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity
(b) the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society
(c) the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
(d) the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical...
and social abilities and competences as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004 p.7).

The ability to effectively apply the acquired knowledge to reality depends so much on the level and quality of training received and the situational factors. Elementary Knowledge serves as a tap root or 'reservoir' to which new ideas are compared, assessed and revaluated. These are methods during training to provide services. These methods include:

- Teacher/student interaction
- Giving of assignments, test, seminar presentation, examinations (Theory/practicum)
- Peer review-designed to monitor students specific aspects of learning appropriate for certain levels of services.

Approaches to quality assurance

For any organisation to achieve quality assurance, emphasis is placed o the following approaches:

- Elements such as controls, job management, adequate processes, performance and integrity criteria and identification of records
- Competence such as knowledge, skills, experience, qualifications
- Soft elements, such as personnel integrity, confidence, organisational culture, motivation, team spirit and quality relationship,
- Infrastructure (as it enhances or limits functionality).

The quality of the output is at risk if any these aspects are deficient.

How to implement Quality assurance system

Quality assurance can be implemented in a general way by identifying the tasks, processes, or systems critical to the business and writing clear guidelines and instructions for staff. Use these guidelines and instructions for training and day to day reference for the tasks, processes and systems covered, this will reduce:

- the number of errors
- waste of time and materials associated with errors
- the number of customer complaints
- the number of problems to fix
- the time spent on giving day-to-day instructions
- the time needed to improve processes and system (by establishing a stable bases).
The two levels of implementation are summarised in the table below. The table also lists the additional things you can do to make your quality assurance easier to apply and even more effective.

**Strategies for maximising effective**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Document guidelines and instructions for critical tasks, processes and system</th>
<th>More consistent results, savings in time and materials, easier improvement.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Implement a recognised quality assurance standard</td>
<td>Coverage of all key quality related activities, better control of systems external recognition through certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Improve the readability of information by writing, structuring and presenting it to professional technical writing standards</td>
<td>Information is more easily understood and more readily accessible, greater savings in time and materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Make information available via computer</td>
<td>Quicker and easier access reduce paperwork, easier to keep up-to-date and accurate, significantly easier to change and improved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Integrate with computerised work flow system</td>
<td>Quicker and easier access, further reductions in paper work, direct connection with activity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Secretarial Quality Assurance and Nation Building**

Nation Building refers to the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state. It can also be defined as the development of behaviours, values, language, institutions, and physical structures that elucidate history and culture, concretize and protest the present, and insure the future identity and independence of a nation. (Wikipedia). This process aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run. Nation-building can involve the use of propaganda or major infrastructure development to foster social harmony and economic growth.

The discharge of the daily activities of the secretarial practice improved the individual, organisation as well as formed the nation building, and development through the organisation. The activities of the secretaries in any organisation radiated in the organisation and evaporated in the society where the people are likely to have the effect positively or negatively.

**Watch Dog:** Secretaries in organisations believe and see themselves as the watch-dog of an organization. Watch dog in the sense that, they act as 'additional' eye, ears, and head of an organisation (Eni (1997) in Agbuwabi (1998). Secretaries is referred to as the life-wire of any organisation, secretaries are always on the alert to source out information that will be relevant to the organisation in terms of profitability, efficiency and effectiveness. This he/she carried out with people within and outside the organisation.
Data Decoding and maintenance Mechanism: The practice places much esteem on data relevance and the technicalities involve in the manipulation and its transformation. The core of the Practice is focused on information management. That is the more reason why educational attainment is a prerequisite for the practice especially a sound knowledge in language that is widely used in the environment the member finds himself as in the case of Nigeria, English language. The ability to effectively handle and manage data hinges a lot on the mastery of the language semantics.

Ambassador: The practitioners of this practice also see themselves as representatives of any organisation both within and outside. Acting as deputy or assistant to executives representing the organisation in business and public functions. This is achieved by its members assuming a motherly role in organisations, playing the host, treating everybody as equal, protecting the interest of the executive and the organisation as stated by Shaw, (1973).

Confidentiality of Information: The enviable secretarial status in organisations is as a result of its reverence for secrecy, and also by the nature of its activities in which it is involved in the confidential affairs of organisation. The practice therefore, emphasise so much on confidentiality of information in whatever form it may be. Secretarial code of ethics emphasises on confidentiality, honesty, and accurate reporting or recording of information and events. Eni (1998) in Agbuwabi (1998).

Confidentiality in this regard, means an intentional and consciously holding back of vital and sensitive information from unauthorised personnel or person(s) access. This is achieved through the pattern of the information management instituted by the practitioner of this field.

Effective communication: An executive secretary is in constant need to communicate effectively with individuals of all professional levels. Throughout the course of a day an executive secretary wears many hats. He/she is a gatekeeper, a confident, a gofer, a record keeper and a manager. He/she tone and demeanour must change based upon the task he or she is performing. For example, when answering he/her boss telephone, he/she must be stern yet professional when speaking with a cold calling salesman. Maintaining each of these various personas is a skill that he/she must continually have.

Technical Proficiency: The executive must be proficient in the use of various computer programmes, such as those used for work processing, financial spreadsheet maintenance and presentation creation. In addition, he/she must be able to properly use a host of office machine, including photocopies, fax machines and multiline telephones. On top of all of that, he must also serve as the information technology help desk for his boss, troubleshooting his office equipment as requested.
If an executive secretary is not electronically inclined by nature, mastering this equipment may prove difficult.

**Organization Skills:** An executive secretary serves as the central nervous system of his boss' office. All correspondence and communication goes through him. In addition, he is also often the clearing house through which the various projects undertaken by the business are passed. If he were to drop the proverbial ball, business may slow down, if not come to a complete halt all together.

**Vision and Mission of the Secretarial Profession:** Members of this profession are seen at all time up holding or working in line with the mission and vision of the profession in order to build the profession and the society.

The secretaries in organisation put their services above self and will ever seek to find and employ more efficient and more commercial ways of doing things.

**Conclusion**

To ensure quality services by secretaries in the contemporary organisation system, mechanism for monitoring the secretarial work as a profession must be made available. As the level of knowledge, increase for a profession, the demand for accountability for its services for the nation building. The major contribution of this paper towards the development of good quality assurance practice is the design for assessing quality assurance in the nation building.

**Recommendation**

All NAPSSON conference/workshop proceeding should be forwarded to federal and state government as well as national and state library and made publication of communiqué in one of the national news paper,

The professional body should develop the will power to sanction any erring secretary in the course performing of his/her services.

Institute should be established to issue certificate to qualified secretaries who will at a glance know the names of her members and delete when necessary. Secretaries should be allowed to work independently in the organisation without be turning like a robot by their bosses.

Secretaries must not deviate from the ethics of the profession when carrying out his/her services.

Secretaries must provide with conducive environment to operate and all the necessary machineries provided.
References


**Accreditation and Quality Assurance**: Journal for Quality comparability and Reliability in Chemical Measurement.


http://do.acm.org/10.1145/1188895.1188906


The *Quality Assurance Journal*, ISSN: 1087-8378 John Wiley & Son.