

## **THE ABILITY OF THE SECRETARY/OFFICE MANAGER TO APPLY MANAGERIAL STRATEGIES AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF CONTEMPORARY OFFICE**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is an empirical study with the primary thrust of examining the ability of the secretaries/office managers to strategically apply their professional knowledge of management and administration in a contemporary office. In order to assess the strategies of office manager's ability to apply managerial and professional knowledge in all fields of work, Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi was used as a case study. The population for the study comprises 59 secretarial staff of the Polytechnic, both senior and junior and the whole of it was studied. The instrument used was a structured 15-item questionnaire validated by some lecturers in the Department of Office Technology and Management. The researchers used mean scores obtained from data collected using 5-point Likert-type rating scale to analyze questions from which findings were made, and results discussed. It is concluded that acquiring and applying these professional strategies would create value of recognition for secretary/office manager and his/her organization. It is recommended among others that organizations should allow secretaries/ office managers espouse their proficient strategies as it would aid immensely in the management and administration of any contemporary office.

**Keywords: Managerial Strategy, Professional Knowledge, Administration of Contemporary Office.**

### **Introduction**

The secretary is often the face of the company. Secretary is often the glue that bonds an office or business together as he/she provides support to a variety of staff and departments in a given organization. According to Tom (2004), a 15-year working manager who was supported by a number of others said, "You have got to stand up for what you know is the right decision for the company, even if the boss disagrees. You live on your reputation, and when you have to do your job to someone else's commands, you have to voice your opinion". William and Lounsbury, (2005), also states that the greatest satisfaction that office managers/secretaries derived is related to their productivity. They are often the first one to

be let go when conflicts arise in an organization and are frequently blamed for office problems that are not of their own making. Office management provides a very structured environment with clearly defined duties for those with financial, organizational, and interpersonal skills. An office manager/secretary needs to have incisive strategies or tactics in his managerial skills so as to guide against or reduce these mishaps.

### **Statement of Problem**

The most wonderful position in the office today and the most sensitive is the position of the office manager/secretary. Yet, it has been discovered that most office managers/secretaries do not really know how to apply their professional knowledge in enhancing their work efficiency. To some, it is attributed to the challenges facing their profession while to some it is as a result of their lack of professionalism. Consequently, the organizations in which they work tend to suffer and the office managers themselves become undermined due to the fact that they cannot strategically apply their professional and managerial knowledge in their works.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Managers who control a group of subordinates directly may be considered as supervisors who in addition, undertake the heavier responsibilities of thinking ahead and formulating policy at a higher range of levels to meet set objectives. They control many groups remotely by strength of leadership, communication and the use of management principles. The levels of management are distinguished. Though he/she should be allowed to play the expected roles and objectives by executives, the secretary must strategically be able to display his/her proficiency professionally (Akpomi, 2001).

Riordan, (2013), states that achievement of results rests with all members of a company and their ability to work together as a business team, which includes employees, supervisors and office managers as well.

### **An Office Manager/Secretary**

An Office Manager is that famous secretary or secretarial staff charged with the responsibilities of office management for greater output in an organization. Victor, (2010), states that 'Secretary as an ubiquitous office worker needed in every type of office (big or small) to assist superiors or executives in carrying out their responsibilities.'

### **The Basic Duties of Office Manager/Secretary**

The duties of an office manager is numerous, ranging from office assistant to the more complex of document formation and production as well as interrelation and representations of superior and executive officers on some important official issues.

Similarly, Akpomi, (2001) has enumerated some of the basic functions performed by the office manager/secretary; the salient among which includes production of mailable documents, effective handling of correspondence and communication, travel arrangement, attending to customers, organizing conference and attending meetings, effective handling of office automation, proper records management, establishing procedure and practices to ensure confidentiality and security and information, etc.

### **Management Improvement Strategies**

The Pitman Dictionary of the English and Shorthand (New Era Edition), 1974 see strategy as an overall plan for coping with series and related problems. Claire and Donald, (1990), developed the following EIGHT-POINT STRATEGY known as managerial competencies that enables secretary to fit all works life.

### **Eight-Point Strategy**

For a competent and well groomed office manager to be successful and achiever of

organizational goals, he/she should possess all these eight-point strategies as clearly stated in the following as postulated by Claire and Donald, (1990).

1. Harnessing and applying information and communication technology skills in the administration of records management.
2. Demonstration of firmness, good human and public relations and diplomacy in the management/supervision and administration of subordinates and customers.
3. Demonstration of the act of prudence in the management of resources of the organization under his/her care such as petty cash.
4. Utilizing appropriate executive staff, task groups, personnel on training, executives and consultants, including a top quality management to aid in the administration of his/her office duties.
5. Aid in interrelated policy development, planning, work programming, and budgeting as a participant in decision making process for setting short and longer term goals.
6. Initiating or strengthening performance strategies to achieve excellence in all aspects of administration and operations, e.g., management, organization, productivity, and quality of services at least cost.
7. Promoting a participatory type of management which involves all supervisors and employees (including unions) in improving administration.
8. Participating in various media and forums to highlight the objectives and accomplishments of an aggressive policy of administrative and management improvement in his/her organization.

### **Managerial Activities**

*Procter and Gamble, (1996)*, grouped managerial activities in six-fold viz., Planning, Organizing, Coordinating, Controlling, Forecasting and Motivating. They are the key pillars that enhance management skills of every competent office manager/secretary.

### **Knowledge**

Every professional or profession is concerned with the use of knowledge in the achievement of objectives, the engineer as the designer and user of equipment and related tools, the medical practitioner diagnoses and prescribes for the ills of his patients, the lawyer or the architect as he serves his clients, *Richard, (2003)*. *An office manager/secretary is always versed, industrious and knowledgeable in all fields of life and therefore proficient.*

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study was conducted in order to determine the abilities of secretaries/ office managers to apply managerial strategies and professional knowledge in the management and administration of contemporary office. Specifically it would:

1. Identify the managerial skills needed by an office manager/secretary.
2. Determine the professional requirements of secretary/office manager.
3. Determine the strategies required by office managers/secretaries in carrying out their professional and managerial duties.
4. Determine how the role of office managers/secretaries affects organizational goals and objectives.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What are the managerial skills needed by an office manager/secretary?
2. What are the professional requirements of an office manager/secretary?
3. What are the strategies required by office managers in carrying out their managerial/secretarial duties?
4. How does Secretary/Office manager's role affects organizational goals and objectives?

### **Methodology**

The Federal polytechnic, Bauchi was used as a case study. The population for the study comprises secretarial staff of the Polytechnic numbering 59, both senior and junior staff. The breakdown of the population is as follows: 38 senior secretarial staff and 21 junior secretarial staff, which was all studied. The instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire validated by experienced lecturers in the Department of Office Technology and Management. The questions were closed-ended which allowed the respondents to choose options that agreed with or nearest to their views. The questionnaire comprises of (15) items. A total of 59 questionnaires were distributed and 50 were fully completed and returned. This formed the background of the analysis. The researchers used mean scores obtained from data collected using 5-point Likert-type rating scale to analyze questions to which values were attached as: Strongly Agree (SA)=5, Agree (A)=4, Undecided (UN)=3, Disagree (D)=2, Strongly disagree (SD)=1. A decision ruled was set so that any response value from 3.05 and above was accepted while any number below 3.05 was rejected.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What are the managerial skills needed by an office manager/secretary?

**Table 1:** Shows the mean response to Research Question 1.

| Variable   | SA  | A  | U  | D  | SD | ? X | $\bar{X}$ | Remark   |
|--|-----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----------|----------|
| Adequate planning and experience enhances office manager's effectiveness and performance.            | 65  | 68 | 30 | 14 | 3  | 180 | 3.6       | Accepted |
| Good organizational skills of the office manager create great impact on effective job performance.   | 75  | 80 | 15 | 6  | 7  | 183 | 3.66      | Accepted |
| The ability of the office manager to properly co-ordinate activities enhances his managerial skills. | 105 | 52 | 21 | 18 | 0  | 196 | 3.92      | Accepted |
| Delegation of administration enhances professional competences of office managers/secretaries        | 25  | 40 | 6  | 50 | 8  | 108 | 2.58      | Rejected |

From the above table, it is observed that inadequate planning and experience enhances office manager's effectiveness and performance with a mean score of 3.6 which was accepted, it was also observed that good organizational skills of the office manager create great impact on effective job performance as agreed with a mean score of 3.66. In the same table, it was observed that the ability of the office manager to properly co-ordinate activities enhances his managerial skills with a mean score of 3.92 and it was accepted. However, the argument that delegation of administration enhances professional competences of office managers/secretaries was rejected with a mean score of 2.58.

### Research Question Two

What are the professional skills required by an office manager/secretary to effectively discharge his routine duties?

**Table 2:** Shows the mean response to Research Question 2.

| Variable   | SA  | A  | U  | D  | SD | ? X | $\bar{X}$ | Remark   |
|--|-----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----------|----------|
| The secretary/office manager's ability to communicate information timely and desirably contributes to organizational goal achievement. | 100 | 44 | 39 | 8  | 2  | 180 | 3.86      | Accepted |
| Effective management information skills enhance office manager's performance in the office.  | 75  | 80 | 15 | 6  | 7  | 183 | 3.66      | Accepted |
| Excellent skill of creating, editing and analyzing information helps the office manager to effectively discharge his/her duties.       | 105 | 52 | 21 | 18 | 0  | 196 | 3.92      | Accepted |
| Word processing skills of the office manager/secretary contribute to his/her effectiveness and performance in office.                  | 125 | 48 | 6  | 10 | 6  | 108 | 3.90      | Accepted |

From the above table, it is observed that the secretary/office manager's ability to communicate information timely and desirably contributes to organizational goal achievement with a mean score of 3.86 which was accepted. It was also observed that Effective management information skills enhance the office manager's performance in the office as agreed with a mean score of 3.66. Also, in the same table it was observed that excellent skill of creating, editing and analyzing information help the office manager to effectively discharge his duties with a mean score of 3.92 and it was accepted. In the same vein, it was observed that Word processing skill of the office manager/secretary contributes to his/her effectiveness and performance in an office that recorded a mean score of 3.90 which was also accepted.

### Research Question Three

What are the strategies used by office managers in carrying out their managerial/secretarial duties?

**Table 3:** Shows the mean response to Research Question 3.

| Variable   | SA  | A  | U  | D  | SD | ? X | $\bar{X}$ | Remark   |
|--|-----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----------|----------|
| The office manager's initiative and strength supports his continuous focus towards achievement of excellence.                          | 100 | 60 | 30 | 10 | 0  | 200 | 4.00      | Accepted |
| Demonstration of good human relations by the office manager/secretary creates better internal and external organizational relationship | 75  | 80 | 30 | 0  | 5  | 190 | 3.80      | Accepted |
| Effective strategic approach of the secretary to giving and receiving quality feedback enhances his effectiveness and efficiency.      | 100 | 68 | 6  | 12 | 5  | 191 | 3.82      | Accepted |

From the above table, it was agreed that secretary's ability to influence the way people think and act can contribute to organizational growth because it recorded an acceptable mean score of 4.00 while demonstration of good human relations by the office manager/secretary is observed to have create better internal and external organizational relationship as agreed with a mean score of 3.80. From the same table, it was also agreed by the respondents that effective strategic approach of the secretary to giving and receiving quality feedback enhances effectiveness and efficiency with a mean score of 3.82

### Research Question Four

How does secretary/office manager's role affect organizational goals and objectives?

**Table 4:** shows the mean response to research question 4.

| Variable   | SA  | A  | U  | D  | SD | ? X | $\bar{X}$ | Remark   |
|--|-----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----------|----------|
| The secretary's role of supervision contributes to the increase in productivity and organizational goal attainment.  | 120 | 76 | 18 | 0  | 0  | 214 | 4.28      | Accepted |
| Office manager's role in demonstrating good and competent skills and knowledge leads to the attainment of organizational goals and objectives.   | 90  | 68 | 24 | 20 | 2  | 206 | 4.08      | Accepted |
| The intermediary role played by the secretary between the organization and the public portrays good image and relationship for the organization.   | 120 | 64 | 18 | 8  | 0  | 210 | 4.20      | Accepted |
| The secretary's role in providing adequate information required for official activities to subordinates and superior officers promotes understanding and speedy accomplishment of tasks. | 135 | 60 | 3  | 8  | 3  | 209 | 4.12      | Accepted |



From table above, it was accepted with a mean score of 4.28 that the secretary's role of supervision contributes to the increase in productivity and organizational goal attainment. It was equally accepted, with a mean score of 4.08 that the office manager's role in demonstrating good and competent skills and knowledge leads to the attainment of organizational goals and objectives. That good image portrayal between an organization and public can be promoted by a secretary was considered acceptable with a mean score of 4.20. It was also accepted with a mean score of 4.12 that the role played by the secretary/office manager in providing adequate official information required to subordinates and superior officers promotes understanding and speedy accomplishment of tasks.

### **Discussion of Results**

The findings of items 1-3 in response to question 1 were all accepted, having recorded an acceptable mean above 3.05, except item 4, which disagreed with the statement that delegation enhances professional competencies. This discovery is odd as most management literatures accept that delegation enhances productivity of secretaries/office managers. Here, perhaps it might be attributed to secretaries using their initiative as part of their responsibility rather than as delegation.

Discovery under table 2, shows that all the four (4) statements were true with proved that there is immense relevance in the acquisition of professional skills; as this will enhance office manager's work effectively. This was equally and rightly examined by Akpomi, (2001).

Result of responses under research question 3, accepting all the statement of arguments, discovered that demonstrating good initiatives and good human relations strategies by an office manager/secretary will aid an organization to attend or achieve excellence; this was equally opined by Claire and Donald, (1990).

Analysis of responses to question 4 shows that all items were accepted as contributory to the role of office managers because they simply affect organizational goals and objectives. This is also supported with Akpomi's (2001) view on the basic roles played by office manager in an organization as strong tool for achievement organizational goals and objective.

### **Conclusion**

It is to be concluded that the ability of the secretary/office manager to apply managerial strategies and professional knowledge any given organization not only enhance performance but also stimulate the achievement of goals and objectives of the organization. Hence office managers have great role to play in displaying their talents and strategies in their day to day office managerial routines.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion above it is recommended therefore that: Secretaries/Office managers should try effectively and efficiently to utilize their professional strategic abilities and regularly up-date these skills and knowledge.



Organizations should allow secretaries/ office managers espouse their proficient strategies as it would aid immensely in the management and administration of contemporary office.

Adequate job facilities should be provided to Secretaries/Office Managers so as to improve their job efficiency and proficiency.

Good working conditions or welfare service especially in areas of medical, social/job security and recreational facilities for secretaries/office managers should be improved and good working environment should be encouraged by management of every contemporary organization (public or private).

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