

INNOVATIONS

Effective Meeting Management Competency a Bedrock to Secretaries Organizational Performance

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to investigate why confidential secretaries are not allowed to provide essential secretarial services during meetings. Additionally, it is the focus of this paper to explore the non-utilisation of confidential secretaries during meetings in the north-western Nigerian colleges of education which has reduced the secretary to a mere typist or receptionist. The paper determines the ways the secretary would acquire office competencies required of him or her in order to effectively handle meetings and other official events in today's workplaces. Secretaries in Nigeria's northwestern colleges of education were not permitted to attend meetings. Other registry personnel handled the secretary's duties, leaving the secretaries to handle auxiliary duties. The study was carried out in Nigeria's northwestern region. The study's population consists of 12 experts: six (6) from office technology and management (OTM) and six (6) from human resource management. To get data from experts, open-ended interviews were employed. Experts were able to provide extensive information throughout the data collection sessions, thanks to the open-ended questions. Nvivo 10 was employed to facilitate data analysis process. Findings revealed that secretaries in the north-western colleges of education were not allowed to take part in meetings. It was also revealed from findings that the graduate secretaries do not receive adequate practical training (meetings simulations) during their studies in the college. recommendations were given that secretaries during training should undergo practical simulations of meetings, in order to be familiar with meetings processes as well as acquire the requisite formal meeting experiences. In conclusion, secretaries should be provided with the necessary modern competencies during their training. This will help them perform their primary secretarial jobs more efficiently after graduation. Practical simulations of meetings will in no small way assist the graduate secretary to be proficient in rendering secretarial services during meetings.

Key words: 1. Secretary 2. Office competencies 3. OTM 4. modern offices 5. simulation.

1. Introduction

Higher education in Nigeria refers to the education that students receive after completing secondary school, at universities, colleges of education, and polytechnics. In Nigeria, the purpose of tertiary education is to provide students with the skills they need to contribute to the country's progress (Ejeka, and Mgbonyebi, 2021). Nigeria, on the other hand, has prioritized vocational and technical education, including office technology and management.

Office technology and management (OTM) popularly known as secretarial studies, secretarial science or secretarial administration is offered at universities, colleges of education and the Nigerian polytechnics (Olukemi and Boluwaji, 2014). This program focuses on the development of resourceful abilities that will allow graduates to work effectively in either the public or private sectors (Ovbiagele, and Mgbonyebi, 2018). Office technology and management is a series of productive skill courses designed to prepare individuals to acquire essential skills and competencies required for effective office administration (Erwat, and Akasi, 2021). The dynamism of the twenty-first century has caused Nigerian tertiary institutions that provide office technology and management programs to concentrate a greater emphasis on teaching students in modern office practices. These dynamisms mandated the secretary to be versatile and competent in the general discharge of secretarial duties.

However, modern secretarial practice requires graduates that are versatile and competent in discharging primary secretarial functions. These primary secretarial functions include generating letters, memos, attending meetings to take notes and later translate the notes to minutes of meetings, writing sundry business correspondences, research as well as receiving visitors. Among the sundry functions of the secretary, organizing and managing meetings is one of the secretary's primary responsibilities. This is why, during training at college, the secretary receives training of managing and covering meetings. In order to prepare the graduate secretary to be proficient in organising and offering the required secretarial services during meetings. The secretary must understand that there are three functions performed before, during, and after meetings in order to operate at their best (Salleh, Musa, & Sulaiman, 2017). Before meetings, the secretary's responsibilities include distributing notice of meetings and ensuring that the meeting venue is available and habitable. In certain organizations, the secretary is in charge of making hotel reservations and arranging local transportation for attendees.

Additionally, during the meeting, the secretary's responsibilities include ensuring that the seating arrangements are correct, providing stationery to members, ensuring that reference materials are provided to members, and ensuring that the attendance register is signed by all members present at the meeting. During meetings, the secretary's responsibilities include taking minutes and reading the minutes of previous meetings. Modern offices are now influenced by information and communication technologies, which assist the secretaries to effectively accomplish tasks, rather than the old manual techniques (Onifade, 2010). According to Nwazor and Onokpaunu (2016), Chukwukelu and Ile (2019), today's workplaces are automated offices that provide new ways to accomplish office businesses. Nigerian office technology and management (OTM) programs have been criticised for failing to produce skilled graduates that are capable of performing optimally in secretarial jobs (Ifejika, 2017). As a result of this outcome, OTM graduates have performed poorly in both public and private enterprises when it comes to organizing and managing meetings. This and other incompetencies has led to increases in the rate of unemployment among OTM graduates (Okoli, and Okeke, 2021).

Abang (2020), on the other hand, stated that business education programs continue to produce incompetent graduates who are unable to adjust to technology and management changes in their workplaces. Despite lecturers' efforts to teach OTM students to acquire the required competences, it appears that human resource managers are still complaining about graduate secretary's incompetence with regards to providing secretarial services during

meetings (Edomwonyi, 2018). When the graduate secretary is put to test in terms of organizing or participating in meetings, human resource managers protest and disallowed the secretaries to participate in meetings. This viewpoint implies that the graduate secretary lacks the necessary qualifications to organize and offer secretarial services during meetings. Competencies are the abilities, knowledge, attitudes, and facts needed to carry out specific tasks. (Röttger, Vetter, and Kowalski, 2016). However, the success of the graduate secretary should not be determined just by the training they received in the college, human resource managers should try to engage the secretary to observe or execute basic secretarial activities such as meeting planning and management. Meetings should be attended by the graduate secretary in order for him or her to have practical experience with meeting etiquette and procedures. This type of simulation would enable the secretary to learn, observe and critically perform meeting-related responsibilities. The secretary, on the other hand, has the advantage of being able to use the office automation software skills that he or she learned during training. These office automation software skills promote efficiency through the manipulation of current office machines for the production of reports, minutes of meetings, and various official correspondences, this software is also unavoidable in the fulfillment of modern secretarial tasks (Huthamah 2018).

It is worthy to note that the amount to which graduates secretaries are being used in both public and private organizations differs depending on how secretaries are employed to provide secretarial services (Agholor and Agholor, 2020). Managers should therefore allow secretaries to perform according to what is prescribed in the secretary's schedule of duties. Although private-sector are profit oriented unlike the public-sector, most times, the private sector are more concerned with hiring graduate secretaries with the general secretarial competencies, this calls for improvements in the training of the secretary so that the identified ineptitude would be corrected. According to Carlton (2019), incompetency has a critical influence in driving away poor employees.

Employees of many private organizations, according to Oni and Koko (2020), have personal computers and a variety of sophisticated office technology equipment. The public sector on the other hand, were not adequately supplied, and this is undoubtedly affecting the performance of their secretaries. As a result, supplying secretaries with the needed working tools would help them perform better in their various places of employment.

2. Statement of the problem

A secretary, according to Salleh, Musa and Sulaiman (2017), is an employee who assists the executive in the execution of office routines by performing a variety of office activities. These office routines include a number of secretarial activities as well as a variety of other responsibilities that may be assigned from time to time.

Meetings and formal gatherings are among the secretarial activities for which the secretary is expected to deliver professional secretarial services (Abdul-Kahar, 2015). According to Onifade (2009), a meeting is the gathering of two or more people to exchange information and ideas in order to find solution to problem(s). Meetings are an everyday occurrence in both public and private organizations. As a result, the secretary became one of the officers in charge of execution and management of meetings. However, due to some foundational problems during the secretary's training, the graduate secretary is not permitted to attend meetings in the north-western Nigerian colleges of education. This is because the graduate secretary could not be able to provide secretarial services during the meeting. This is an evident fact that left the human resource managers to assign the secretary some petty jobs during meetings.

Both office technology and management teachers and human resource managers who work directly with the graduating secretaries were asked for their opinions about the secretary with regards to attending meetings. According to a human resource manager, secretaries were

not allowed to attend meetings in their college. This deficit resulted from the secretaries' lack of realistic simulation of meetings during their training. This practical simulation if properly administered to students while on training, would allow the graduate secretary to gain the necessary management skills for meetings. During the simulation, the secretary would be able to learn how to create minutes of meetings in a practical environment and become familiar with formal meeting settings. Instead of being given the opportunity to learn, the graduate secretary was barred from attending meetings. They were only authorized to offer refreshments and perform minor tasks. However, it appears that there is a disconnect between the competencies demanded of graduate secretaries by human resource managers and what secretaries are taught in college (Igwe, Lock and Rugara, 2020).

3. Methodology

A semi-structured interview was used to gather information from 12 participants. Human resource managers make up six of the participants, while office technology and management specialists make up the other six. This paper relied on open-ended interviews to gain a better knowledge of specialists (Weller, Vickers, Bernard, Blackburn, Borgatti, Gravlee and Johnson, 2018). Rich data was acquired because experts were picked based on a set of criteria. The criteria used to pick the participants were: 1. relevant experience and extensive knowledge in the experts' disciplines, 2. years of expertise in the subject area 3. Having experience working with fresh graduate secretary, and 4. Willingness to engage in the study.

Participants signed a consent form indicating their desire to participate. They were informed that their voices would be recorded and used solely for the purposes of this study, according to the consent form. Their genuine names would not be revealed instead, pseudonyms would be used to represent them. The participants were fully informed about why they were chosen to participate, the length of the interviews, the use of audio recording equipment to record their voices during the interviews, and how the information received from them would be treated with utmost confidentiality (Tuner, 2010).

However, audio recording of the participant's speech was essential to avoid data loss and to ensure the interviewee's full attention (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell, 2013). To make the data analysis process easier, thematic data analysis was utilized in conjunction with Nvivo 10. As is usual in qualitative research, the interview methodology was developed with ethical considerations in mind. The purpose of the study was to undertake an in-depth investigation of the study gap, hence the qualitative approach was chosen.

4. Discussion and findings

Secretaries in north-western Nigerian colleges of education are not allowed to attend meetings, according to the study's findings, since they were unable to provide efficient secretarial support. Only serving refreshments, distributing meeting materials, and doing limited auxiliary tasks secretaries were allowed to perform during meetings. According to experts, the secretaries' ineptness in taking minutes of meetings and performing necessary secretarial responsibilities during meetings is the reason why their college management refuses to let them attend meetings.

Despite the fact that these secretaries were never assigned to render secretarial services during meetings, the circumstance continued to make the secretaries redundant during meetings.

Below is an excerpt from a participant:

“Well here we don’t allow our secretaries to attend meetings because they don’t have any work to do during the meeting. The only services they could render during meetings are providing refreshments,

distribution of working materials and other duties they could be assigned to do. The secretaries cannot take and produce minutes of meetings". (P3 OTM).

Experts were also asked to reflect on their experiences with secretaries and the tasks they assigned them before, during, and after meetings. According to the experts, the secretary's responsibilities before meetings include preparing the meeting agenda in collaboration with the executive and inviting members to meetings by written notice. Ascertain that the meeting location is secure and that all necessary utilities are operational, as well as that all meeting materials are available are among the duties assigned to the secretary before meetings.

A participant was quoted saying:

"Before meetings they are being asked to prepare the agenda and send notice of meetings after consultations with the executive or the chairman of the meeting, the chairman will guide the secretary what should be contained in the agenda. These are the work of the secretary before meetings" actually, here we don't allow our secretaries to attend meetings. P7 HRM.

According to the above participant 7, human resource manager, (P7 HRM) submission, secretaries in their college simply do some auxiliary work before meetings. These auxiliary work include typing meeting notices and agendas to be discussed at meetings. This revealed that the secretaries in these colleges are underutilized since they are not permitted to provide necessary secretarial services during meetings. This is in contrast to Ali, Burcu, and Murat (2011), who claim that the demand for individuals who can produce information, develop new ideas, prepare files, compose business correspondences, and utilize computers efficiently is considerable in the present modern office. Therefore, since the secretary is trained to develop new ideas, prepare files, compose business correspondences and use computers efficiently, he or she should be allowed to perform holistic secretarial services in their places of work. Consequently, the attitude of under-utilising the secretary in these colleges of education should be stopped.

P7 HRM's statement was backed up by another participant who is an OTM expert. According to the experts, secretaries' responsibilities in regards to meetings at their college are limited to preparing the meeting space and ensuring that it is maintained clean. This also suggests that the secretaries do not attend their college's meetings.

Below is an excerpt from the expert's response during the interview:

"Before meetings we ask them to arrange for the venue, the conference room where the meeting is going to be held, they supervise the office assistants who are junior staff to make sure that the venue is conducive" (P11OTM)

The majority of participants agreed with the above two experts that secretaries should not be allowed to enter meetings to provide secretarial services. Experts also stated that due to their incompetence, they do not allow their secretaries to join meetings. When the experts were asked if secretaries may be permitted to attend meetings to observe how the process is carried out, all the participants welcome the idea yes. It would be a wonderful concept, according to experts, because secretaries could learn and acquire the necessary competencies for

conducting meetings as well as develop their capacity for generating minutes of meetings.

An excerpt from the response of the participant is presented below:

“This is a good idea, the secretary would be able to see meeting in practice, the secretary will also learn how to formulate minutes of meetings. The secretary will also stand a chance of consolidating what he has learned about meetings during training” (P3 OTM).

According to Usman (2020), the secretary's job included organizing and participating in meetings, as well as taking and typing minutes of meetings and preparing drafts for the chairman's feedback. Secretaries were also taught their responsibilities before, during, and after meetings throughout their training. Although these tasks were not practically simulated for graduate secretaries on training to observe and learn the practical applications for management and secretarial services during meetings.

In addition to the foregoing, experts were questioned on the duties performed by their secretaries during and after meetings. The secretary is not allowed to stay in meetings, according to participants, and they are instead assigned to undertake auxiliary tasks. Participants reported that secretaries were only given the draft minute of meetings to type in their responses to the duties performed by the secretary after meetings. The minutes of the meeting, on the other hand, were produced by other registry officers appointed to serve as secretaries during meetings. With this, it can be seen that the work of the secretary has been hijacked by other officers because the secretary was not allowed to provide secretarial services during meetings, this situation is threatening the relevance of the secretary.

The executives' mentality of treating secretaries as mere typists or receptionists needs to change. The modern secretaries, according to Abdul-kahar (2015), are able to deliver important secretarial services in areas where they are needed holistically. Their engagement to deliver secretarial services in the organisation, would serve as a motivator for secretaries to rise to the occasion and tackle the challenges of satisfying office demands.

Managing and organizing meetings is one of the duties of secretaries, according to the schedule of duties obtained in the Nigerian colleges of education staff conditions of duties. This is consistent with Usman (2020) assertion that the roles of the secretary in an organisation involves managing information, perform basic financial functions, attending meetings as well as performing office planning and organization. Therefore, secretaries should be involved in the planning and execution of meetings in their organisations. The weakness of the secretaries observed by the human resource managers, could either be corrected from the secretaries training ground or through simulation mentorship by the human resource managers. Additionally, secretaries are responsible for delivering secretarial services to the college, according to the secretary's schedules of duties. Managing meetings, taking minutes of the meetings and producing drafts of the minutes for further review by the executives are part of the secretarial services expected to be performed by the secretary.

Therefore, secretaries should be encouraged to perform their duties in order not to be seen as redundant staff who perform below expectation. The ability of the secretary to optimally perform his or her duties effectively, will make the secretary remain relevant (Salleh, Musa and Norlisaa, 2017).

However, it is worthy to mention that this study's response rate is particularly outstanding, because it indicates a general consensus among participants, resulting in empirical data saturation. The process of data gathering had to be halted because it has attained empirical saturation. A hierarchical model depicting the frequency of participants' responses during the

interviews is shown in Figure 1.1 below:

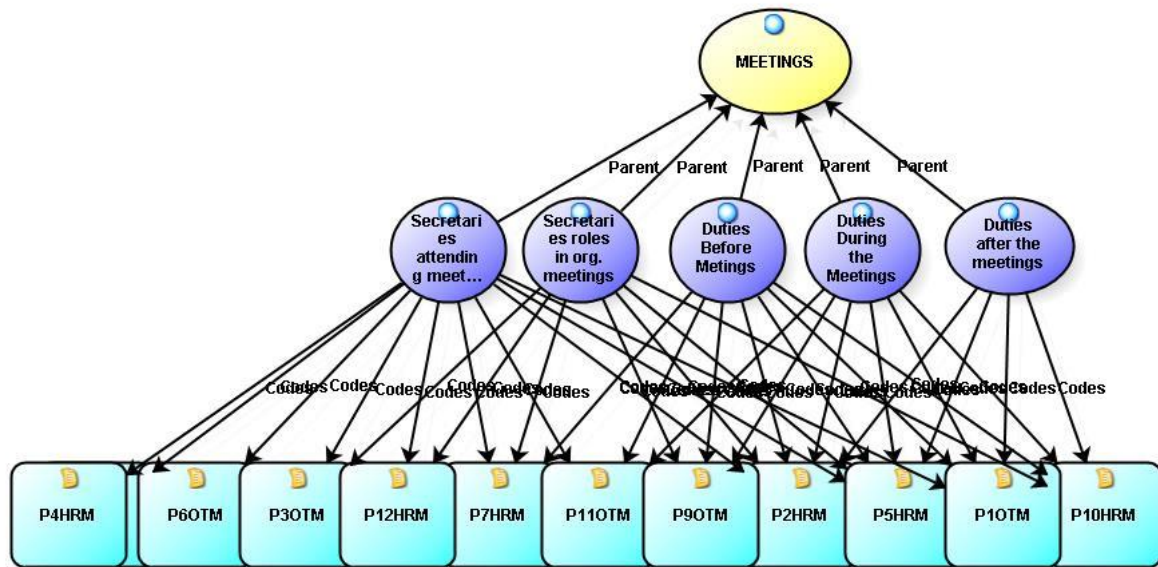


Figure 1.1: hierarchical model indicating frequency of participants responses during the interviews

5. Conclusion

Experts agree that having secretaries who can perform important secretarial services during meetings is desirable. Secretaries of the colleges' non-attendance to meetings reflected their lack of ability to organize and lead meetings. Meeting simulations during school training should be conducted to enable graduate secretaries to be familiar with formal meeting protocols so that, once employed, they can build on their college training. The human resource managers should strive to consolidate and mentor the graduate secretaries by engaging them to attending meeting processes at their organisations.

It was also determined that secretaries in the Nigerian north-western State colleges of education are under utilized and were not giving the chance to provide the basic secretarial responsibilities for which they were hired.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this paper, it is recommended that:

1. Human resource managers should allow secretaries working in the Nigerian colleges of education of the north-western States to attend meetings in order to have practical experience which would help them understand how meetings are run.
2. Human resource managers, should also ensure that the secretary's responsibilities should be assigned to him in order to avoid the secretary being considered redundant.
3. Colleges of education that offers office technology and management should ensure that secretaries during training are exposed to meeting simulations in order to prepare them to be familiar with and learn about effective meeting protocols.

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