THE IMPORTANCE OF SECRETARIAL SKILLS IN HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

With the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the skills of members of the secretarial profession have been greatly enhanced for optimum effectiveness of practitioners and the organizations in which they work. Similarly, the place of secretarial skills in human capital development is no doubt invaluable. There is a correlation between secretarial skills and human capital development because the former is a function of the latter hence, the stock of human capital determines the productivity of the workforce. Where the workforce possesses the required skills and competencies, productivity is said to increase. There is also a correlation between the required skills achieved through human capital development on the one hand and national development on the other hand. Therefore, human capital development is critical when discussing secretarial skills because human capital development is synonymous with deliberate and systematic training and retraining which provides secretaries with skill.

Secretarial Studies is part of Vocational and Technical Education which is greatly gaining awareness and recognition in Nigeria as typified by the number of Polytechnics and Vocational Centres springing up across the country. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE, 2004) is the body saddled with the responsibility of regulating vocational and technical education at the National and Higher National Diploma levels in the country. Students seeking admission into Secretarial Studies programmes are mainly school leavers from secondary schools, technical and vocational schools, private commercial schools, teachers training colleges and private candidates (Ovbiagele & Amiaya, 2008).

Secretarial skills are skills acquired by secretaries during and after training to enable them perform their office jobs effectively and efficiently as well as being self-employed hence, in business education, it is described as education for the world of work and education for entrepreneurship. These skills may be regarded as foundational skills. Professional secretarial skills can be obtained through human capital development either as a certificate programme or as a customized professional skill programme dedicated to the development of professional secretarial skills for individuals needed in the world of work. These skills are also needed for the success of every organization. Those possessing professional secretarial skills pass through the process of human capital development.

Functions of the Secretary

The acquisition of professional secretarial skills is to enable the recipients to function effectively in the modern office environment. Accordingly, the secretary with professional skills performs some basic functions or roles that have now radically changed from what it used to be previously. The secretary of today or modern day secretary performs the task of the receptionist, planning the employer’s itinerary and appointments, supervising junior workers, reminding her boss of appointments and assignments, filtering all calls, callers and visitors to avoid undesirable encroachment on her boss’ time and handling all incoming and outgoing mails.

Today’s secretary composes and produces outgoing mailable correspondences, prepares reports using modern facilities such as computers and the internet, handles filing and indexing, orders
supplies and all the attendant functions such as maintaining minimum and maximum re-order levels. Other functions include maintaining financial records together with impress accounts and the preparation of briefs for her boss concerning interviews and advice where necessary. The professional secretary of today is also responsible for all activities relating to meetings, such as before meeting, during meeting and after meeting.

The role of the professional secretary of today in the business environment is also constantly changing and expanding with various forms of administrative and managerial responsibilities (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 2004). However, some of the greatest challenges the new roles pose include those of leveraging customer care skill and managing the human resource as well as a wide range of organizational and management techniques required to operate effectively. There is also the function arising from integrity, technique and approaches to provide a proactive support to her employers within the organization and the ability to develop the managerial aspects of her position. Adaptation to change provides the professional secretary an array of functions with the attendant challenges. No doubt, the secretary of today performs some very strategic functions in an office and these functions, for obvious reasons, are wide-ranging (Amiaya, 2006).

**Critical Secretarial Skills that Employers Demand**

**As Stated by Quintessential Careers**

According to Quintessential Careers (2010), certain skills have been associated with the professional secretary. The list covers a wide spectrum. However, they include the following:

1. **Communication Skills** – These have to do with written, verbal and listening skills. By far, some of the communication skills most often mentioned by employers are the ability to listen, write and speak effectively and fluently. There is no gain-saying the fact that successful communication is critical in modern day business organizations.

2. **Analytical/Research Skills** – This is in the area of thinking with demonstrated talent for identifying, scrutinizing, improving and streamlining complex work processes.

3. **Computer-Technical Literacy** – With the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and by implication the use of the computer, almost all jobs in the office now require some basic understanding, application and use of the computer hardware and software, especially word processing, data processing, spreadsheets and e-mail.

4. **Flexibility/Adaptability/Managing Multiple Priorities** – Today’s goal-driven leaders, including the professional secretaries who maintain a productive climate and confidently motivates, mobilizes, mentors and coaches subordinates to meet and sustain high performance standards require these skills.

5. **Multicultural Sensitivity/Awareness** – There is possibly no bigger issue in the work place today than the subject of diversity. Such diversities include language, religion, the concept of federal character as in the case of Nigeria, gender, individual characteristics and dispositions, among others. The job seekers, particularly the secretaries, require demonstrating a conscious and deliberate awareness and understanding of other people.

6. **Planning/Organizing** – In these areas, the skills and ability to design, plan, organize and implement projects and tasks within a stipulated time frame are very important. The subject of goal-setting is not isolated – the secretary should be able to set measurable and achieving goals, taking into consideration, all known and unforeseen constraints.

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7. **Teamwork** – In modern-day organizations, teamwork requiring working in one or more work groups is inevitable. It thus becomes necessary for the individual to develop and sustain the
ability to work with others in a professional manner in the course of attempting to achieve organizational and individual goals.

8. **Result-Driven** – The professional secretary should be result-driven and an achiever with exemplary planning and organizational skills, and possessing a high degree of detailed orientation.

9. **Problem-Solving/Reasoning/Creativity** – This involves the ability to find solutions to problems using the power of creative reasoning of past experiences along with the available information and resources.

10. **Interpersonal Skills** – The ability to relate with, and inspire co-workers to participate and prevent conflicts is very essential, given the amount of time spent at work each day.

**Concept of Human Capital and Human Capital Development**

Human capital, as seen in modern growth theory, is an important growth factor. As a concept, human capital is defined by Garavan, Morely, Gunningle & Collins (2001) as capital that has four key attributes, namely, flexibility and adaptability, enhancement of individual competencies, the development of organizational competencies and individual employability. Igun (2006) also defined human capital as the total stock of knowledge, skills, competencies and innovative abilities possessed by individuals.

That human capital development is about supporting and investing in human capital, coaching, training, internship and human capital management, economic, social and technological development, among others, is saying the obvious. Aigbokhan, Imahe & Ailemen (2007) described human capital development as being concerned with the transformation of individuals to increase and sustain productivity.

Virtually all organizations around the world recognize the importance of the people that make things to happen in the organizational arena. It is these people, otherwise known as the human factor (human capital), according to Adefuye (1999) that has moved from the wings to the centre in the organizational setting for it is this form of capital – human capital – that provides and sustains competitive advantage (Schultz, 1993).

Organizations also appreciate the invaluable contributions of people – human capital – in the conduct of businesses hence, there is the new trend of classifying employees as assets. Every investment in human capital development adds value to the development process of any society and this is particularly true in respect to skills development. Schultz (1961) is one of the early contributors to the study of the importance of human capital. He identified five ways through which human capital can be developed. These are health facilities and services broadly conceived to include all expenditures that affect life expectancy, stamina, strength, vigour and vitality of the people. The development of human capital transcends mere acquisition of intellectual ability. It seeks to improve the productivity of individuals and thus make them more useful to society.

**Professional Areas of Human Capital Development for Secretaries**

In order to function effectively, the professional secretary requires some measures of development that comes through the process of human capital development (Wayne, 1999). This can be achieved through the following:

1. **Business skills:** The individual needs to learn how to effectively handle customers and deal with data generation, storage and management;

2. **Communication skills:** To the extent that organizations survive through and with information that comes in through communication, the professional secretary requires to
master the art and science of communication in all ramifications, including the channels of communication, communication barriers and a host of others;

3. **Innovation:** The professional secretary requires development in the ability to solve problems using both creative and critical thinking;

4. **Self-improvement:** The individual concerned has to understand and improve upon personal strengths, and being conscious of self-awareness and limitations;

5. **Interpersonal relationship:** The development and cultivation of good interpersonal relationship in order to maintain an effective work relationship for improved and sustained performance is a necessary consideration for development.

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For the office duties or functions to progress appropriately, the professional secretary has to be abreast with current trends with reference to office machines, office technology, office terminologies such as teleconferencing, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as well as others, and be able to respond to them in the right manner, and in a proactive manner. Secretarial skills in human capital development are a pre-requisite for national and individual development, especially on the part of practitioners notwithstanding the attendant or associated problems, such as funding. These, no doubt, help to expand the horizons of the human intellect and an overall personality of secretaries.

The importance of secretarial skills in human capital development can also be seen in the following:

1. **Productivity:** Secretarial skills acquired through the concept and process of human capital development helps in increasing the productivity of employees which, in turn, contributes to the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

2. **Esprit de corps or team spirit:** The work environment is made up of different functions and people with different backgrounds and expectations. The need for the concept of esprit de corps or team spirit, therefore, becomes very important because it helps in inculcating the sense of team work, team spirit and inter-team collaborations. It also helps to inculcate the zeal to learn among employees.

3. **Organizational culture:** Every organization has its own culture; a good knowledge of this culture helps the professional secretary in the development and improvement in the organizational health and culture together with effectiveness. Furthermore, this knowledge helps in creating a learning culture within the organization.

4. **Organizational climate:** The climate of an organization goes a long way to determine its success or failure. The knowledge of this, therefore, helps the professional secretary to build a positive perception and feelings about and within the organization. It is pertinent to state that the secretary gets these feelings from the organizational leadership, colleagues and subordinates.

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5. **Quality:** The concept of quality covers a wide spectrum; it helps in improving the quality of work and the quality of work life.

6. **Healthy work environment:** A developed professional secretary is able to understand that a healthy work environment is very important in building a positive employee-employee and employee-management relationship so that the goals of the employees and the organization can align.
7. **Health and safety**: Human capital development is centred on human beings hence, a good knowledge of the importance of health and safety in the work place contributes to improving the health and safety of the employees and the organization.

8. **Morale**: Much has been said by industrial psychologists among other behavioural specialists. Morale increases productivity and self-satisfaction to mention but a few. To a large extent, too, it has a positive correlation with the creation of a better corporate image.

9. **Profitability**: The whole essence of the existence of any organization, particularly the profit-oriented concerns is to maximize sustainable profit. An acknowledgement of this on the part of the professional secretary makes it possible to develop a positive attitude towards profit orientation and maximization.

**Conclusion**

Secretarial skills and human capital development relate to the ability of an individual – the secretary – to perform optimally in the work environment that is characterized by globalization and ICT. The functions of the professional secretary of today, no doubt, cover a wide spectrum. The skills of the professional secretary do not come about without some effort and training or education that is the whole essence of human capital development. The concept of human capital development is all-embracing.

Human capital development, itself, cannot take place without adequate funding, and this is one of the major challenges militating against the achievement of human capital development with regard to the acquisition of secretarial skills needed for national development. Unfortunately, too, today’s secretaries, no doubt, face some challenges which serve as threats to their ability to perform maximally.

**Recommendations**

In order for the concept of human capital development in the area of the production of secretarial skills for national development to succeed, the following recommendations are appropriate:

1. Human capital development should be planned and adequately funded in line with the needs of the economy by applying international standards. There should be regular interaction among planners, employers and builders of human capital to facilitate the process of national development.

2. Government at all levels should endeavour to provide quality education through proper and adequate funding as well as facilitate the quality of work life.

3. The importance of human capital development for economic growth and national development was given appropriate attention in the past and even in the present national development plans of the nation. However, adequate action to back this has been lacking. Therefore, proper planning and sustainable development of human capital development policy should be the order of the day.

4. The professional skills of those in the secretarial profession should be updated regularly through training and retraining; exposure to modern trends in the area of office automation, ICT and improvement in the quality of work life.

5. It is imperative to step up human capital development as it relates to the production of skillful and professional secretaries that will contribute in no small measure to national development.

**References**


