

# Responsibilities of Human Resource Managers in Enhancing Secretarial Capacity for Maximizing Efficiency

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the necessity of enhancing office technology skills among professional secretaries in Nigeria, particularly in Kano State, located in the north-western region of the country. It advocates for human resource managers to prioritize selecting suitable capacity-building training programs for their secretarial staff. Furthermore, it suggests implementing mechanisms to ensure secretaries provide feedback post-training and establishing a system to verify their attendance. Employing an interpretative qualitative design paradigm rooted in phenomenological philosophy, the study aims to capture subjective meanings and individual interpretations shaped by social contexts. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with eight participants and analyzed using Nvivo 10 software. The paper underscores the significance of ongoing capacity building and human resource development for confidential secretaries, emphasizing the need for continuous growth to enhance their competencies. It recommends human resource managers to assess employee participation in training programs and to prioritize relevant skill development aligned with the secretarial profession. Additionally, it suggests that sponsorship for capacity-building initiatives should be limited to programs directly related to the secretaries' profession and conducted by reputable organizations.

**Keywords:** Human resource development, Office competencies, Optimal secretarial practice.

## Introduction

The secretarial profession is regarded as one of the oldest and most prestigious occupations. The secretarial profession has evolved to include persons who are entrusted with sensitive information and work as executive assistants (Musa, 2016; Umaru, 2020). Therefore, a secretary in an organization is supposed to be committed to the growth and improvement of the organization. This is despite the fact that they perform a wide variety of tasks, from answering phones to sorting mail to keeping track of meetings and other office-related appointments. During training, secretaries were engaged in several simulations and practical drillings in order to become conversant with daily secretarial routines (Elhathy, Elhadry, Elgamil & Kilic, 2020). These kind of simulations and practical drillings assist the

secretary to acquire dexterity and the needed agility for the execution of various secretarial functions. This is because several secretarial functions are practical in nature and requires frequent practice in order to become proficient. This has made simulation to be a very important tool that prepares the secretary to develop mastery in secretarial practice.

Walters and Rodriguez (2017) postulated that training and development is a human resources management activity that aims to bridge the expected gap between present and expected performance. Therefore, human resource managers of organisations should look into the secretary's requirements and propose a formidable capacity building training that would prepare the secretary to perform effectively in the area of public relations and other areas of concern that would enhance productivity towards attainment of organisational objectives. Salleh (2012) recounted that human resource managers should strive to be more competent in discharging their duties to meet the changing needs and growth of the organisations. Office technology and management which is a segment of technical and vocational education (TVE) contributes towards employee's preparation and contribute in making nations to become industrialised (Sulaiman, 2012).

Human resource managers roles in the development of personnel are crucial to the attainment of organisational goals and objectives, this is because effective organisational performance is fortified by the effectiveness of its employees (Majeed & Shakeel, 2017). Furthermore, the effectiveness of employees determines the expected optimal productivity of workers. The optimal utilisation of employees influences the achievement of corporate objectives. This will bring about job effectiveness with considerations of job satisfaction which promotes and encourage the expected outcome and staff aspirations of getting commensurate rewards.

Consequently, the secretary is always involved in numerous administrative works in the organisation, these duties are mostly supportive in nature. The colossal duties of the executives were expected to be supported by the secretary. This is where the secretary performs many administrative duties for or on behalf of the boss. Despite performing administrative supportive duties, the secretary performs primary and traditional duties. These primary duties are associated with receiving and sending official correspondences, performing filing jobs and several other secretarial functions (Umaru, 2020). Secretaries' roles in an office are pivotal because the secretary keeps the office organised, ensure the schedules of the executives are met and executed as well as controls and organise various meetings, appointments and ensure effective flow of staff and visitors who want to see the executives (Ovbiaghele & Mgbonyebi, 2018).

In recent years, secretaries have been confronted with concerns of capacity building that are viewed as a one-time annual jamboree where secretaries are chosen to attend refresher courses in exchange for a stipend and a change of scenery. Secretaries from different organizations are nominated to attend workshops, conferences, and seminars. These secretaries would attend the session as scheduled; however, some may choose to send their friends to register their names, pay the registration fees, and collect the certificate on their behalf. This attitude tells on the performance of these type of erring secretaries. This attitude has also resulted to poor performance despite attending capacity building programmes which the organisations sponsored hugely. This is due to the fact that organizations invest in the secretaries training, and the expected consequence of the training is always poor, with no improvement in the secretary's performance after the training. In many organizations, human resource managers failed to do a thorough check to determine whether or not these

secretaries had attended the program. Whenever secretaries were sponsored for training and they submit proof of payment as well as a certificate of attending the programme, the human resource managers would accept and consider that the employees have attended the programme. As a result of this behavior, organizations' training investments have failed to produce favorable benefits.

Therefore, it is important that the secretaries be re-educated on the need of participating in any type of capacity-building training they were nominated. They should be informed that the organization uses its resources to support them for such programs in order to grow and develop their secretarial service delivery capacities. The secretaries should also be reminded that their profession entails ethical practice in which trustworthiness is a segment of ethical considerations in secretarial practice.

Human resource managers, on the other hand, can employ capacity building for secretaries to increase their capacity for effective service delivery. According to Armstrong (2020), human resource development is a component of capacity building that involves providing individuals with knowledge, skills, and access to information, as well as training that allows them to work effectively. Sangurde (2019) further asserts that human resource development includes anything from on boarding a new employee to offering opportunity to learn new skills, supplying resources that are relevant to the employee's job, and any other developmental actions. However, the focus of this paper is on the role of human resource managers in developing the ability of secretaries in order to deliver the finest secretarial services to the organisation. The capacity-building strategy on which this paper focus is one in which the secretary would be trained and retrained in order to increase effective performance. Therefore, human resource managers should figure out how to get the secretary updated on contemporary office management and secretarial skills.

Human resource managers should recognize more factors that would bring out the importance of strengthening employee capability in order to facilitate successful decision-making. This is because the effectiveness of employee training could be measured through staff performance evaluations. As a result, any organization that wants to enhance its employees' potential must invest in their capacity building. Employees' talents must be improved on a regular basis in order to increase their abilities and achieve favourable outcomes.

When organisations invest in its employees' growth, it is believed that the firm's productivity will increase, employees will be motivated and the employees will gain enthusiasm for doing their best at work. Furthermore, investing in employee capacity building promotes professionalism because employee capacities are raised to a higher and more up-to-date level in accordance with global best practices.

### **Methodology**

An interpretative paradigm based on phenomenological philosophy was applied in this investigation. This is because individual interpretations based on their social life understandings gave subjective meanings, understanding and acknowledgement by the paradigm. Hermeneutics and phenomenology, according to Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa, and Varpio (2015) are the intellectual basis for interpretive inquiry. The inherent intellectual basis of phenomenology leveraged the researcher to explore better understanding of the participants' perspectives based on how they see their surroundings and the subject under inquiry.

The study employed semi-structured interviews to collect data from eight (8) human resources managers. In their respective organizations, the human resource managers deal directly with secretaries. They are also responsible for designing short- and long-term training programmes for their employees. This made the data collection process went smoothly and provided helpful information about the secretary's capacity building needs. The purpose of this paper's dependence on open-ended interviews is to acquire a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and knowledge (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Because participants were chosen based on their extensive knowledge in their domains, this has enabled collection of adequate information during data collection.

The interview sessions were audio recorded and utilized strictly for the purposes of this study, participants were informed, the measure was meant to avoid data loss during transcription (Valeria, Symonds & Brown, 2016). Participants' names were represented by pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy by not revealing their real names (Gerrard, 2021). Thematic data analysis using pattern coding was employed using Nvivo 10 to help with the data analysis process. The interview methodology was developed with ethical considerations in mind in accordance with qualitative research ethics.

### **Discussion and findings**

As earlier mentioned in item 3 above, open-ended interviews were employed to collect data from 8 participants. These participants are human resource managers working in the federal colleges of education in Nigeria. All participants were of the view that capacity building for the secretary is very important considering the role the secretary plays in the organisation. The participants were unanimous that when an organisation develops the capacity of their secretaries, the efficacy of that intervention would be felt by the organisation. The participants also lamented that whenever their employees went for capacity building of any type, they use to see changes in their performance. They use to see improvements in the staff performance and sometimes they witness new innovations from the staff.

Capacity building is a viable tool that empowers employees to develop their capacities. This was also the view of another participant. The participant lamented that capacity building assist the human resource managers at the time of annual staff assessment and evaluation. The human resource managers use employee's performance based on the capacity building received within the year under review to assess staff. Participants were also unanimous that the education of the secretaries in terms of meetings should be improved so that secretaries who are not only multi-skilled, but knowledgeable and lifelong learning readiness would be produced (Salleh, 2017). Salleh (2017) went further to stress that human resource managers should need to apply knowledge and practices especially in this modern office practice. The participant reported that this kind of strategy would be helpful to secretaries. The system would enable making objective staff annual assessment.

When the human resource managers were asked on the general capacity building of their secretaries, their responses were also unanimous. The participants reported that the secretary's capacity, as the master controller of the organisations official activities is very critical and should be given priority. Participants lamented that when you have a versatile and well talented secretary, management workload would be effectively supported thereby allowing the management to have

full concentration on their managerial responsibilities. This was supported by Salleh, Sulaiman, Mohaffyza, Lai and Ahmad (2016) were they asserts that whenever an organisation employed, train and retain competent employees, the management of that organisation would be adequately supported and enable the management to concentrate more on their managerial responsibilities.

The chief executive who has a competent secretary whose capacity is developed to a level that the secretary could perform his or her functions without supervision, that executive officer would always have enough room to attend to several official demands without stress. Below is an extract from the response of the participant: Decision making is made easily, improve problem-solving skills of employees, broaden their general knowledge Asikhia, Ogunode, Samson, & Oluwatoyin 2021). This statement is in consonant with a participant's comments that capacity building makes the secretaries to be good decision makers and improve their problem-solving skills. The secretary while dealing with junior staff under his or her supervision, display good problem-solving skills, courtesy of capacity building trainings he or she underwent. The change in dressing behaviour and other ethical considerations of the secretary were witnessed as outcome of the capacity building:

The above submissions made by participants has proved that capacity building is very important to the secretary because it helps the secretary to develop professional skills and made the work of the human resource managers to be simplified. However, some participants observed that some secretaries were of the habit of either absconding from training or totally fail to attend sponsored training programmes. As reported by participants, some of these employees might go to the training venue, register and abscond. Sometimes they would send their colleagues to pay the registration fees on their behalf, collect the training materials and certificate of attendance. This attitude always left the organisations at lost and also the secretaries' performance is stalled. Participants lamented that the human resource managers should device means for checkmating this attitude so that secretaries could leverage the benefits of capacity building for optimal productivity. Employees with this mindset require particular orientation to be reminded of the benefits of human growth and capacity building. They should also be reminded of the importance of trustworthiness, loyalty and truthfulness which are cardinal in the secretarial profession ethics.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Capacity building is an intriguing platform that organizations utilize to grow their workforce by organizing or funding seminars, conferences or symposia for their employees. This approach is critical because organizations that spend in their employees' training get the benefits. Human resource managers should make effort to locate appropriate training that is relevant to secretaries' schedules. Choosing the correct courses, seminars or conferences will facilitate the development of new skills that are relevant to the secretarial responsibilities. Based on the findings and conclusion of this paper, it is recommended that: Organisations should strive to develop their secretaries' capacities through sponsoring appropriate workshops, symposia, conferences, long and short-term trainings. Organizations should encourage their secretaries to self-sponsor themselves in order to leverage the values of capacity building.

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**Data Availability:** The author holds all the data employed in this study and is open to sharing it upon reasonable request.

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