

The Prospective Secretary in the Modern Business World: A Case Study of Administrative Secretaries in Koforidua Polytechnic

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Abstract

This study aimed to access the prospective secretary in the modern business world using Koforidua polytechnic the New Juabeng Municipal Assembly as a case study. This study aimed at filling the gap by gathering relevant data on the roles the prospective secretaries' plays in today's modern world. Primary data were obtained through the administering of questionnaires to 55 respondents working in Koforidua polytechnic. Data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) analytical tool and subject to both descriptive and inferential statistics. Multiple regression analysis was carried out to see if any, relationship existed between the dependent variables, modern business world (MBW) and the independent variables; Administrative Assistant (AA), Administrative Secretary (AS), Executive Secretary (ES), Secretary (S), and Secretary-Receptionist (SR). The findings of the study showed that some of the respondents who took part in the survey were not actual secretaries but their daily activities involved secretarial and clerical duties. It is worthy to note, that 70% of workload by superiors are shifted to the secretaries to perform. This means that a modern secretary has to be well equipped in all fields in the discharge of its duties.

Keywords: Modern Business World, Administrative Assistant, Administrative Secretary, Executive Secretary, Secretary, and Secretary-Receptionist.

1.0 Introduction

Despite the numerous Secretaries produced from the various tertiary institutions in the country, there are yet some setbacks in the day to day activities of the Secretary as well as a search for what actually is embodied in Secretaryship in business. With the increasingly sophistication of consumers and the availability of options for customers have prompted businesses and organizations as well as the civil service, Institutions/Departments to perform at maximum efficiency, putting up the best practice For every organization to perform effectively, it depends on the capability of the executives and personnel. At the Centre of the varied capabilities of these executives and personnel is the prospective Secretary who must harmonize these human capacities towards the corporate goals. This might occur to be a tall order if one continues to hold secretarial positions and from the rather narrow perspective as a woman's job to typing letters. Against, the background of socio- technological changes in contemporary business, it is necessary to make radical shift from such a rather limited definition of Secretarial roles and positions. As a first step towards this radical shift, one would ask "who is a prospective Secretary and what does an Administrative Secretary do?" A prospective secretary is someone who aspires to be a secretary whiles an administrative professional's job requires a diverse range of abilities; From managing schedules, coordinating meetings, and fielding calls to planning events, deciphering legal documents, and creating PowerPoint presentations, today's administrative assistants are expected to effortlessly and efficiently juggle it all.

The problems raised by those questions are the very essence of the confusion arising from the complexity of secretarial roles and positions. Hence, attempts will be made on different definitions of a Secretary and Secretarial roles of secretary in the work place.

The term Secretary comes from the Latin word *sēcrētārius*, meaning "confidential employee".

Today, a Secretary is still an employee who is privy to confidential information. In this respect, the job has not changed. As The Oxford English Dictionary states, a Secretary is one who is entrusted with private or secret matters and one who is employed to conduct correspondence, to keep records, and usually to transact various businesses for another person or for a society, corporation, or public body. American Professional Secretaries International (APSI) defines a Secretary as an Executive Assistant who possesses a mastery of office skills, demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, exercises initiative and judgment, and makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority.

Accordingly, a Secretary usually does almost everything in the office, such as, typing; is the process of writing or inputting text by pressing keys on a typewriter, keyboard, cell phone, or a calculator. It can be distinguished from other means of text input, such as handwriting and speech recognition, keyboarding; is a typewriter-style device, which uses an arrangement of buttons or keys, to act as mechanical levers or electronic switches, transcribing; is the systematic representation of language in written form, processing mail; Preparing incoming

and outgoing mail or correspondence for distribution, telephoning; an apparatus, system, or process for transmission of sound or speech to a distant point, especially by an electric device, scheduling appointments.

Customer Appointment Management scheduling software allows businesses and professionals to manage scheduling appointments and bookings, greeting visitors; it's best to greet each person with a smile or handshake if possible to welcome visitors, composing and editing documents; implies writing and proof reading for letters, researching and coordinating meetings; learning a modern way of adding value a secretary's work, conferences; is a meeting of people who "confer" about a topic, and teleconferences; a teleconference or teleseninar is the live exchange and mass articulation of information among several persons and machines remote from one another but linked by a telecommunications system. Terms such as audio conferencing, telephone conferencing and phone conferencing are also sometimes used to refer to teleconferencing, making travel arrangements, organizing time and work. These form the daily office routine for a Secretary. In modern society, the Secretary is an important member of the management team, responsible not only for carrying out the executives wish but also for helping to maintain a well-organized and a more efficient office.

In other words, a Secretary entering the work force faces many possible job situations. Therefore only those who have received specialized professional training will survive in a world where the methods of handling information are complex. Technically, according to the survey by American Professional Secretaries International (APSI) in 1981, the titles of Secretaries can be classified into five categories: Administrative Assistant, Administrative Secretary, Executive Secretary, Secretary, and Secretary-Receptionist.

Each has its techniques and qualifications, but they all must have: Secretarial skills, organizational ability, administrative ability, good communication skills, and self-motivational skills before they serve as professional Secretaries.

Traditionally, a Secretary refers to a person who schedules appointments, gives information, takes decisions as well as minor administrative and business details, records and notes incoming mails, locates and attaches appropriate files to correspondence, compose and type routine correspondence, ascertains the nature of the business of callers and arranges travel schedules and reservation.

In the same vein of tradition, secretary ship is generally viewed as women's profession. This even became more so in industrial Europe (European countries) when business grew and managerial jobs were considered the exclusive preserve of men. Thus set in male chauvinist society, secretary ship largely suffered a varied range of sexist discrimination, administrating in the use of feminine gender of her and she as possessive and personal pronouns respectively, in reference to the profession.

In contemporary sense however, a Secretary is referred to as a person who acts as a personal representative, responsible for the accurate conveying of information to his or her employer and the accurate execution of instructions. There are various kinds of Secretaries some of which are Private or Personal Secretaries, Administrative Secretaries, Company Secretaries, Office Secretaries, Medical Secretaries, Executives or Administrative Assistance, to number but a few. Personal secretary deals with everything related to the office work: phone, agenda, presentation, meetings, etc. They spend most of their time at the office whereas Personal Assistant deals with everything in the client personal life: house, car, travel, shopping, reservations, gifts, pets, etc. They spend most of their time outside the office running errands and juggling multiple tasks.

The activities of the Secretary may vary greatly from the employer and will depend on a number of factors such as the Secretary's own intelligence, the position of her boss.

The prospective Secretary's role are modified and molded by various variables such as:

- vii. The size and nature of the organization, that is, the type of employers and callers will depend on the nature of the organization, which in turn will determine the Secretary's position.
- viii. The status of the Boss and his ability and willingness to delegate work may also modify a Secretary's role.
- ix. The personality of the executive, that is, his education, emotional material and stability are important variables.
- x. The Secretary's own ability to assume administrative duties, for which her executive is responsible that is, her ability to stand up to day-to-day challenges.
- xi. Personality and intelligence of the Secretary.
- xii. Initiative and invocation of the Secretary.

1.1 The History of Koforidua Polytechnic

This study will be based on Administrative Secretaries in Koforidua Polytechnic despite the categories of Secretaries spelled out. Koforidua Polytechnic which was established in the year 1997. The Polytechnic, which was founded with the vision of producing high-level, career-focused and skilled manpower to support the country's industrial growth, has since 1999 turned out graduates with Higher National Diploma (HND) in Accountancy, Marketing, Purchasing and Supply, Statistics, secretary ship & Management, Hospitality, Electrical, Mechanical, Automotive, Building Construction, Civil Engineering, Energy Systems, Environmental Technology and Computer Science. Bachelor of Technology programs includes that of Accounting, Electrical, Telecommunication, and Procurement.

The Polytechnic currently has four Schools and one Institute namely, the School of Business and Management Studies, School of Applied Science and Technology, the School of Engineering, School of Built and Natural Environment and the Institute of Open and Distance Learning (IODL). The Polytechnic has increased its academic programme offerings significantly from two (2) at the inception of 1997 to a total of fourteen (14) HND programmes. Out of the fourteen (14) HND programmes, six (6) are from the School of Business & Management Studies, six (6) are from the School of Engineering and the remaining four (4) programmes are from the School of Applied Science and Technology, and two (2) programmes in the School of Built and Natural Environment.

In keeping with its Strategic Plan (2010 – 2014) to increase access to tertiary education for many prospective students, the Polytechnic plans to introduce Bachelor of Technology (B. Tech) programmes for the existing HND programmes. The polytechnic currently runs Bachelor of Technology (B. Tech) programme in Procurement and Automotive Engineering. Other programmes are also at various stages of the accreditation process. The Polytechnic is committed to rapid staff development to meet the needs of the growing student population which currently stands at 5,708 for the 2012/2013 academic year. Through several collaborations, a significant number of staff members are pursuing further studies in Ghana and abroad.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Basically, prospective Secretaries are to be placed at the positions of Administrative or Private Secretaries respectively, after which they can aspire to higher levels on the academic ladder of the secretarial profession. A Prospective Secretary as outlined in the introduction depicts that there is much more than what is currently construed by the masses. The duties performed are distinct and for this matter, it is worth noting that the prospective Secretary is placed at a preferable position that deserves performance.

It is rather sad to note that some Higher National Diploma graduates are employed and placed at the positions of stenographer Secretaries which is very low a position to be occupied by persons of such qualification. It has even been realized and misconstrued that any person who knows how to type is a Secretary but there is more to who a secretary really is than just the mere knowledge and the skill of copy-typing. This is to say that the work of a typist is sometimes taking of minutes which have become a demoralizing factor for prospective Secretaries and already practicing ones. All these reasons and many others yet to be unleashed have necessitated the quest and desire to delve into this topic and discover the reasons why graduates Secretaries are treated unfairly in the job market.

Literature Review

2.1 The Nature And Origin Of The Word “Secretary”

The term Secretary comes from the Latin word *sēcrētārius*, meaning “confidential employee”. Today, a Secretary is still an employee who is privy to confidential information. As *The Oxford English Dictionary* states, a Secretary is one who is entrusted with private or secret matters and one who is employed to conduct correspondence, to keep records, and usually to transact various other business, for another person or for a society, corporation or public body.

American Professional Secretaries International (APSI) defines a Secretary as an executive assistant who possesses a mastery of office skills, demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, exercises initiative and judgment, and makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority.

Another definition from the Longman Dictionary of English, New Edition states “a Secretary is a person with the job of preparing letters, arranging meetings and travels, or it could also be an officer of an organization who keeps records, writes official letters etc.”

The Dictionary of Occupational Titles, Anderson et al (1986) also defines a Secretary as one who schedules appointments, gives information to callers, takes dictations, relieves officials of all clerical work and minor

administrative and business details, records and note incoming mail, locates and attaches appropriate files to correspondence to be acted upon by the executive, composes and types routine correspondence, ascertains the nature of business of a caller, and arranges travel schedules among a host of other things.

In *Applied Secretarial Procedures* A. C. Price et al (1982) defines a Secretary as one who can think for, act for, anticipate the whims and increase the output phenomenon of her executive.

The Institute of Chartered Secretary and Administrators (ICSA) also defines a Secretary as an officer of a company appointed to carry out general administrative duties.

In Davies and Smith's *Secretary in Today's Office*, a Secretary is defined as an assistant to the boss. It is further defined in *Duties of a Secretary* by John Wiley as someone who types letters, does filing and communicates on the behalf of his/her superior. In contemporary sense however, a secretary is referred to as a person who acts as a personal representative, responsible for the accurate conveying of information to his or her employer and the accurate execution of instructions.

2.2 How are Secretaries Classified

According to the survey by *American Professional Secretaries International (APSI)* in 1981, the titles of Secretaries can be classified into five categories: Administrative Assistant, Administrative Secretary, Executive Secretary, Secretary, and Secretary-Receptionist. Each has its techniques and qualifications, but they all must have: secretarial skills, organizational ability, administrative ability, good communication skills, and self-motivational skills before they serve as a professional secretary.

2.2.1 Administrative Assistance

An **Administrative Assistant** is a person who provides a high-level administrative support for an office and for top executives of an organization. Generally, he/she perform fewer clerical tasks than do Secretaries and more information management. In addition to arranging conference calls and supervising other clerical staff, they may handle more complex responsibilities such as reviewing incoming memos, submissions, and reports in order to determine their significance and to plan for their distribution. They also prepare agendas and make arrangements for meetings of committees and executive boards. They may also conduct research and prepare statistical reports.

2.2.2 Administrative Secretary

The **Administrative Secretary** is any person who performs advanced level duties by assuming responsibility for adjunctive administrative duties under the guidance of an administrator. Applies in-depth knowledge of program areas, the mission of the division, and the Administrator's jurisdiction, policies and views. Provides support services to Administrator by supplying specific information, composing reports and correspondence, and taking initiative to recommend actions, or by taking action in modifying and/or improving unit procedures, policies, rules and regulations. Depending on the size of organizational unit, he/she may offer some clerical support to administrative superior, often in matters which must remain confidential. Typically performs administrative support for an agency/division Administrator.

2.2.3 Executive Secretary

An **Executive Secretary** is any Secretary who assists a person with higher level of responsibility. For example, Directors in Marketing, Planning, Directing or Managing. He/she is responsible to undertake research projects for the executive, preparing drafts estimates/budgets, recruiting and training of staff.

2.2.4 Secretary-Receptionist

A **Secretary-Receptionist** is an employee taking an office administrative support position. The work is usually performed in a waiting area such as a lobby or front office desk of an organization or business. The title "Receptionist" is attributed to the person who is specifically employed by an organization to receive or greet any visitors, patients, or clients and answer telephone calls. A Secretary-Receptionist is often the first business contact a person will meet at any organization. It is an expectation of most organizations that the receptionist maintains a calm, courteous and professional demeanour at all times regardless of the visitor's behaviour. Some personal qualities that a Receptionist is expected to possess in order to do the job successfully include attentiveness, a well-groomed appearance, initiative, loyalty, maturity, respect for confidentiality and discretion, a positive attitude and dependability. At times, the job may be stressful due to interaction with many different people with different types of personalities, and being expected to perform multiple tasks quickly.

2.3 Some Possible Duties of A Secretary

As mentioned earlier on, the grand name "Secretary" has quite a different meaning when analysed from the practical point of view. In simple terms, a Secretary will be expected to possess additional skills, qualities and attitudes compared to someone employed as a shorthand typist, to adopt a career approach to the job and

demonstrate abilities in keeping with a support role. Aspects of a Secretary's duties must necessarily reflect attitude and qualities which an employer could not reasonably expect to find in other office workers who are appointed largely to perform only duties that from time to time, may be assigned to them as may be determined by their bosses.

The duties of a Secretary are not only more complicated and numerous than those of the stenographer and a typist, they involve greater responsibility, flexibility discretion, good judgment and other significant personal elements.

2.4 Contemporary Employment

In a business many job descriptions overlap. However, while Administrative Assistant is a generic term, not necessarily implying directly working for a superior, a Secretary is usually a personal assistant to a Manager or Executive. Other titles describing jobs similar to or overlapping those of the traditional Secretary are Office Coordinator, Executive Assistant, Office Manager and Administrative Professional.

- v. At the most basic level a Secretary may need only a good command of the prevailing office language and the ability to type, and may spend a large part of his or her time filing and fetching papers (or the equivalent regarding electronic files and database information) or answering telephones.
- vi. A more skilled Executive Assistant may be required to type at high speeds using technical or foreign languages, organize diaries, itineraries and meetings and carry out administrative duties which may include accountancy. An Executive Secretary / Assistant may also control access to a manager, thus becoming an influential and trusted aide. Executive Assistants are available for contact during off hours by new electronic communication methods for consultations.
- vii. The largest difference between a generalized Secretary and skilled Executive Assistants is that the Executive Assistant is required to be able to interact extensively with the general public, vendors, customers, and any other person or group that the executive is responsible to interact with. As the level that the executive interacts with increases so does the level of skill required in the Executive Assistant that works with the executive.
- viii. Those Executive Assistants that work with corporate officers must be capable of emulating the style, corporate philosophy, and corporate persona of the executive for which they work. In the modern workplace the advancement of the Executive Assistants is co-dependent on the success of the executive and the ability of both to make the job performance of the team seamless whereas the job place evaluation is reflective of each other's performance Executive Secretary for now.

2.5 The Status of the Secretary and the Changing Work Environment

It is extremely difficult to determine the exact extent to which the number of Secretarial jobs has been affected by Information Technology (IT), where more jobs are created due to increased commercial growth of business resulting handling process where fewer people are needed. It is in this respect that the status of a Secretary could be questioned. The coming into existence of word processing packages and many other enhanced office machines poses a great opportunity for the Administrative Secretary's position as can be observed in an institution such as Koforidua Polytechnic.

The sophisticated kinds of Information Technology by their nature completely change the role of the Secretary to suit the modern business trends. It is important that the contemporary Secretary takes an initiative in the development of their own roles to safe guard the duties as they are shared by equipment in a more flexible manner. It is important that the Secretary's position be updated from time to time in order to meet the changing conditions in the modern office especially with Secretaries in large organizations.

Information technology also enables Secretaries to become more involved in the organization of their company particularly when it comes to the use of modern equipment. By using data program on computers, the Secretary can assimilate and present information to meet his or her superiors' needs. In the area of administration, Secretaries are ideally placed to handle the operation of information technology and exercise greater control in decision making in office systems and procedures.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This section provides an overview of the method used for our research and how data for this study were collected

and analyzed in order to examine our hypotheses and arrive at the findings. The main objective of this research is to examine the prospective secretary in the modern business world. In order to understand and establish a reliable result we adopt both the use of the qualitative approach and quantitative methods. Quantitative method or approach is adopted because of the empirical investigation we conduct into this phenomenon. Data for this section is mainly acquired through the administering of questionnaires to be answered by Koforidua polytechnic and its employees. Data obtained from the survey was tested by SPSS software. In addition, in-depth interviews were used for some questions that investigate how it happened (Yin, 2009). This qualitative method can throw up important contributions that enrich the real context. In this paper, Koforidua polytechnic was chosen as case study. The relevant information is acquire through the field survey using questionnaires of employees and semi-structured interviews of top managers.

3.2 Case Selection

The process of selecting a suitable case is an essential step to build theories from case studies. This became important because when unsuitable cases are selected, the result obtained will be misleading and will not help us achieve our research objectives. Appropriate selection of case helps define the limit for generalizing the finding of the study and control waste (Eisenhardt, 1989). Considering the number of cases that can be studied at a particular time choosing a relevant case becomes an essential obligation (Pettigrew, 1998).

3.3 Data Collection

The population of the survey constituted the management and non-management staff of Koforidua polytechnic. The researchers used the purposive sampling technique and accidental technique. The study used a sample size of fifty (55) respondents. Due to adequate time the researchers devoted for the data collection, the researchers were able to get fifty- two (52) questionnaires that were administer.

3.4 Measurement of Variables

For purpose of this research, questions on the prospective secretary in the modern business world were asked and placed on a 5- point scale ranging from strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1) in form of statement. This scale is adopted from Deshpande et al. (1993); Jaworski and Kohli (1993); and Samiee and Roth (1992).The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement in relation to the prospective secretary in the modern business world.

4.0 Analysis & Findings

4.1 Statistical Population and Statistical Samples

For analyzing data, the statistical package program SPSS 20.0 is used. According to the descriptive statistics, the sample consists of 52 respondents from Koforidua polytechnic in Ghana. Out of the 52 respondents, 14 (26.9%) were women and 38 (73.1%) were men. 32.7% of the sample (17 participants) are between the ages of 20-30, 57.7% of the sample (30 participants) are between the ages of 31-50 and 9.6% of the sample (5 participants) are at the age of 51 or older than 51. 32 participants (61.5%) are married, 20 participants (38.5%) are single. 17 participants (32.7%) are high school graduates, 26 participants (50.0%) are university graduates, 8 participants (15.4%) have a Master’s Degree, 1 participant (1.9%) have a Doctorate Degree.

4.2 Statistical Analysis

This section of the study reports the statistical analysis of the data on prospective secretary and modern business world. Table 1 reports a summary of descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation between all variable used. The dependent variable used is modern business world (MBW). The independent variable used includes; Administrative Assistant (AA), Administrative Secretary (AS), Executive Secretary (ES), Secretary (S), and Secretary-Receptionist (SR).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation

Variable	N	Mean	SD	2	3	4	5
AA	52	3.20	0.414	.800**	.680**	.623**	.612**
AS	52	3.22	1.292		.589*	.702*	.460
ES	52	4.08	1.034			.526*	.634**
S	52	3.05	0.175				.234
RS	52	5.87	0.223				

*P ≤ 0.05; **P ≤ 0.01. (2-tailed)

Inferences from the Pearson correlation analysis above prove that all the independent variables had a positive correlation with the dependent variable. Thus all the independent variables had a significant contribution to the modern business world. Form the correlation table 1, the administrative secretary has the highest correlation

coefficient of 0.800 at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed). In addition, other independent variables such as executive secretary (ES) and Secretary (S) also have a correlation coefficient of 0.680 at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed) and 0.623 at $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed) respectively. Furthermore, the receptionist secretary (RS) had a significant correlation with the dependent variable at 0.612 at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

Table 2 Regression Analysis

Models	R-square	Unstandardized coefficients.		Standardized coefficient	t-value	Sig.
		Beta	Standard Error	Beta		
1. AA	.448	-.405	.059	.233	.082	0.001
2. AA, AS	.567	-.567	.061	.640	0.818	0.000
3. AA, AS, ES	.716	-.593	.063	.338	5.908	0.000
4. AA, AS, ES, S	.818	-.426	.068	.592	8.443	0.000

The regression model was established using the equation: $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \dots + \beta_n X_n$ where: Y is the dependent variable, “ α ” is a regression constant; $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ and β_n are the beta coefficients; and X_1, X_2, X_3 , and X_n are the independent (predicator) variables. Standardized beta coefficients were put in the regression equation. This revealed that diverse workforce can be predicated as: $Y = \alpha + .23 X_1 + .64 X_2 + .34 X_3 + \dots + \beta_n X_n$ where: Y is (MBW); X_1 is (AA); X_2 is (AS); X_3 is (ES), and X_n is the nth predicator.

5.0 Conclusion

The focus of the study was to access the prospective secretary in the modern business world using Koforidua polytechnic in the new juabeng municipality of Ghana as a case study. Specifically we sought to establish the effect of Administrative Assistant (AA), Administrative Secretary (AS), Executive Secretary (ES), Secretary (S), and Secretary-Receptionist (SR) on today's modern business. We adopted both qualitative (case study) and quantitative methods respectively. Koforidua polytechnic was selected to gather data, which was acquired from answers obtained from our administered questionnaire. There was a strong positive relationship between prospective secretaries and today's modern business. Based on the analysis and findings of the research, the following recommendations are made.

A prospective secretary must equip him/herself with the modern tools and technology that can assist the secretary deliver his/her duties assigned equitably. A prospective secretary must be respectful and accord the supervisor and visitors necessary admiration. Regular training must be organized for secretaries since they are the eye of any organization to remind them and also learn the modern way of going about the duties. Heads of departments or supervisors must have confidence in their secretaries that they can perform their duties with less supervision. A modern secretary must not be stereotype in discharging duties but rather flexible enough to adapt to all environmental conditions

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