

Influence of Professional Secretarial Ethics on Organization Performance

Awwal Ayuba Darki and Peggy Anioke Onyefuruchi

Department of Office Technology and Management
School of Management Studies
The Federal Polytechnic Damaturu, Yobe State
Correspondence e-mail: aadarki@fedpodam.edu.ng

Abstract

The roles of secretaries in the administration of organizational services across the country cannot be overstressed. They play significant roles in the collection of data, processing, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. Despite the dynamic nature and competitiveness of offices nowadays, secretaries are still needed for the effective and efficient office functions. Therefore, secretaries should value their job and do what is right to maintain their employment. This calls for the provision of a good and comprehensive professional secretarial ethics to guide the secretaries in the discharge of their duties. This paper focuses on the professional ethical conduct for secretaries, and an in-depth literature review was made on the concept of professional ethics, the secretary and his qualities, office ethics, unethical practices, internal and external factors that contributes to unethical practices in the our offices. The study concludes that upholding ethical practices in the offices enhances better performance of the secretary in the office and ethical secretaries, who persevere, in the midst of unethical work environment, stand the chance of getting unusual promotions, recognition and upliftment from their organizations. The study recommends that organizations should create ethical awareness, encourage ethical reasoning and support ethical actions and that every organizations should always lay emphasis on the need for their secretaries to uphold and always apply all professional ethics in the delivery of official assignment for effectiveness and improved performance; fair remuneration for the secretaries to forestall need pressure that makes them compromise and training institutions should intensify training of their students with continuous emphasis on application of professional ethics in delivery of office functions as contained in the OTM curriculum.

Keywords: Professional, ethics, Secretary, Organisation, Productivity

I. Introduction

The public sector of every nation is germane to her national development. Perhaps, this accounts for why a larger proportion of the Nigeria national budget has been voted for the creation and sustenance of public enterprises (Adeyemo and Salami, 2008). Through its Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Government puts in place policies, programmes and services that help galvanize development at all levels, engender economic progress and increase trust and connection between the Managers of the State and the people (Imhonopi and Urim, 2013). On the contrary, the performance of public sector in Nigeria has been replete with varying contradictions (Adeyemo and Salami, 2008) and has even become an epitome of all that is corrupt, mediocre and fraudulent (Imhonopi and Urim, 2013). As it stands, the public sector in Nigeria has virtually collapsed. Politics and politicization has systematically bastardized the very essence of the sector. Consequently, morale is weak, remuneration is very poor, efficiency is no more, competence has been ditched and merit abandoned (Kagara, 2009).

Professional ethics are principles that govern the behaviour of a person or group in a business environment. Like values, professional ethics provide rules on how a person should act towards other people and institutions in such an environment, Ede, (2015). Professional ethics may be understood as professionally acknowledged measures of individual and business conduct, values, and guiding principles. Professional ethics is nothing but a code of conduct applicable to different professions and is set up by the expert members of such profession or professional organizations. The underlying philosophy of having professional ethics is to make the persons performing in such jobs to follow the sound, uniform ethical conduct Adebayo, (2012). Professional ethics can also be defined as a collection of moral guidelines developed by an organization to influence employee behavior both inside and outside of the organization or workplace. No doubt, displaying professional ethics in the workplace have been seen to have aided organizations to meet up with their envisaged profit margin over the years. Every organization places a high value on ethics. Any organization's ethical conduct or legislation are just as important as its mission statement.

It is observed that as organizations attempt to uphold ethical standards, there is a level of agreement around the world which according to Steinberg (1994), described ethics as "everyday decency" that encompasses integrity, honesty, and fairness. According to Segunda (2019), some of the professional ethics expected of secretaries that must be adhered to includes but not limited to confidentiality, honesty, loyalty, reliability, responsibility, work unsupervised, multi-tasking, flexibility among others. It is further expected that adherence to professional ethics and moral standards could assist secretaries to improve in the performance of numerous office functions including administrative functions, human relation functions, information and communication technology functions among others (Ikelegbe, 2018). Ethics, according to Ikelegbe (2018) is synonymous with morality. He added that there is no doubt that ethics should be an important part of business activities. Ethical behavior according to Braimoh (2017) is knowing the difference between right and wrong and consciously choosing to do right. He emphasized that workplace ethics are important especially to the secretarial profession because ethical standard when adhere to, promote organization culture based on shared values of integrity, accountability, transparency and respect. In addition, ethical standard enhance teamwork, provide emotional security, protect institutional property and enhance positive public image.

Organizations and other Institutions whether public and private in Nigeria always need secretarial services because these services greatly assist the organizations and institutions in carrying out their main functions and ultimately achieve their respective objectives. No organization can easily function without secretarial duties and the secretary. The secretary is very important personnel in the success and growth of the organization. Therefore, the ethics of a secretary are moral principles relating to the job that he will be bound (Onifade, 2010). In short Secretary's ethics are principles or norms that state how secretaries should conduct themselves in the course of carrying out their official duties.

Traditionally, a secretary was one who supported an executive by helping to manage their schedules, receive visitors, take minutes of meetings and produce communications and other documents. However, today's secretaries (also known as administrative assistants, office coordinators, executive assistants, office managers etc.) are using computers, the internet, and other advance office technologies to perform vital

“information management” functions in the modern office. The nomenclature for secretarial studies Programme is now Office Technology and Management (OTM). The Programme came into being in 2004 in response to persistent calls by business educators and employers for a change due to the advent of ICT and the modern office scenario. The aim of OTM program is to produce graduates who should fit properly into the office of any computerized organizations and perform professionally the functions of a secretary which include relating the functions of the office to the whole organization, attending meetings and providing information as may be required, making accurate records of proceedings, filing and retrieving information, taking appropriate action independently when face with challenging secretarial office problems, showing personal qualities and attributes that are conducive and co-exist with the work group (NBTE, 2004). OTM Programme trains students to acquire office skills and with in-depth administrative office need to meet the demands and challenges in the business environment. The Programme incorporates course in office application, office technology, business administration, professional career, professional ethics and general studies courses. The design of the OTM Programme components appear to be responsive to a global initiative (Okoro in Akwajou and Pwol, 2009).

In every organization, big or small, private or public, there exists the need for secretarial services because secretarial functions are inherent in organizations whether or not a secretary is employed. The secretarial function is just pervasive in every organization and no organization can easily function without a secretary. This explains the importance of secretaries to the success and growth of organizations. A secretary, it must be explained from the onset, is an assistant to an executive who has office skills in handling correspondences and functions to provide communication support services on matters of routine and administrative issues. In whichever organization he works, a secretary faces a lot of challenges in the performance of his job. Challenges come in diverse ways – sexual harassment, pressure from co-workers to disclose official secrets which he has easy access to because of his work relationship with the chief executive, playing the risky role of shielding his boss in almost all circumstance even when it involves doing the illegal or unethical thing. The challenges are much more serious when the secretary is ethical and upright, doing his job with honesty and integrity in a work environment that is unethical. Doing the right thing in an environment that does not allow or favour such is a very difficult thing.

Secretaries with good work ethics often possess generally strong character. This means they are self-discipline, pushing themselves to complete work tasks instead of requiring others to intervene. They are also often very honest and trustworthy, as they view these traits as befitting the high quality employees they seek to become. Secretaries are expected to demonstrate strong character in order to distinguish themselves from others (Ikelegbe, 2018). Agholor and Agholor (2020) stated that the ethics of a secretary are moral principles relating to the job that he will be bound by. These requirements are automatically taken on board when one accepts any position as a secretary and one will be expected to uphold them at all times. There are a number of set of regulations, standards, protocol, codes of conduct and ethics and trust policies providing parameters for safe and ethical practice of any profession. Some areas of professionalism are framed by law of which sanctions are placed on violators. Regulations serve as a baseline for professionalism. In the views of Segunda (2019), some of the professional ethics which secretaries must adhere to include confidentiality, honesty, loyalty, reliability, responsibility, work unsupervised, multi-tasking, flexibility, commitment, teamwork, accountability, reliable, strong character exhibition and

dedication to the job. This implies that adherence to professional ethics would assist secretaries in the performance of their functions. Therefore, this paper is to review related literature of professional ethics on the job effectiveness of secretaries for organizational performance.

II. Concept of Professionalism

The term Professionalism means different things to different people in different contexts. One view is that it may be fruitless to try and pin down one exact meaning like many words and concepts which have different dimensions and changes over time too. Being a professional, firstly, can be factual and thus associated with holding certain qualifications and or membership of a professional body and secondly be descriptive measuring the characteristics expected of a professional and thus includes ongoing professional development and ever increasing levels of excellence in services giving by a professional. The first is regulatory in form, and the second is a self-improvement and an ambition-led approach on what is expected of a professional

Professionalism has a basis in individual characteristic and values but also largely defined by context. Its definition varies with a number of factors including organizational support, the workplaces, expectations of others, and the specifics of each service user encountered. This contextual professionalism is based on well- established or even innate personal qualities and values. There are regulations that provide basic guidance and signposting on what is appropriate and that is unacceptable but act as a baseline for professionalism.

According to Encarta Dictionaries, professionalism is conforming to professional standard which includes the skills, competence, or character expected of a member of a high trained profession. According to McQuerry (2013), the principles of professionalism are a standard of personal conduct by a professional in his business dealings. Professionalism can be presented in a holistic view, all-encompassing concept, an overall way of being which comprises a range of attitudes and behaviour. It is everything from the time you get to your office to the time you get home specifically and explicitly, professionalism is competence, knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristic in doing or performing a job.

III. Concept of Ethics

The concept ethics has a hydra-head meaning and as such it has been defined by various scholars. Ugoji (2006) traced the history of ethics and described its inception as old as mankind. Most commonly, the word ethics refers to “a code or set of principles by which men live” (Popkin and Stroll 1979). The nature and meaning of ethics draws its root from a Latin word “ethicus” and Greek “ethicos” which both draws its origin from “Ethos” meaning character or ideal standards of behaviour (Ugoji 2006). In addition she stated that ethics consists of standards of behaviour acceptable to the society; it makes moral judgments of human conducts. It examines the question of what actions are morally right, or wrong, good or bad, fair and proper.

The term "ethics" refers to a set of norms and guidelines that are intended to serve as guiding principles for any profession or organization (Adeyinka, 2014). It is also a rational investigation into or theory of the criteria of right and wrong, good and evil in terms of character and conduct, that should be recognized by

a group of people. It is worth noting that the goal of ethics is to determine the laws that regulate human behavior. Every ethical decision is based on the underlying and guiding principles of individual values.

The role ethics plays to enhance better performance in the office cannot be slighted. This is because ethics establish the goals that organization should pursue, and the way in which people inside organizations should behave to actualize these set goals. Due to the fact that ethics deals with human beings Ugoji (2006) further traces the sources of ethics to genetic inheritance, religion, legal system, philosophical system, code of conduct, and cultural experience.

IV. Concept of a Secretary

The term secretary emanates from a Latin word “secretarius” which denotes a “confidential employee” and this Latin word was derived from another Latin word “secretus” meaning secret. A *secretarius* was a person who oversee the business confidentiality for a powerful person such as a King, etc.. *Secretus* has to do with privacy. Hence, a secretary is an officer expected to keep the secret of an office or organization. But it must be noted that no two secretarial positions are alike. Azuka and Agomuo (1993) noted that the factors that determine the nature of secretarial position include, among other things, “the size of the organization, the nature of the organization’s business, the willingness of the boss to delegate work, the status of the secretary’s immediate boss as well as the ability and willingness of the secretary to assume responsibility”.

Today, secretaries (also known as administrative assistants, office coordinators, executive assistants, office managers, etc.) are using computers, the internet, and other advanced office technologies to perform vital information management functions in the modern office. Secretaries no longer “simply” type correspondence for “the boss”. Now, they often write that correspondence, as well as plan meetings, organize data using spreadsheet and database management software, interact with clients, vendors, and the general public; supervise the office and other staff, handle purchasing, and even train other workers. It is the new role of secretaries that has given the profession a new definition by the Professional Secretaries International (PSI-1984) in Eni (1999) thus: “an executive assistant who possesses a mastery of office skills, who demonstrates the ability to assume responsibilities without direct supervision, who exercises initiative and judgment, and who makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority”. This means that a secretary is a person employed to coordinate and facilitate the day-to-day administrative support activities of an office or organization. A secretary is regarded as the live wire of any organization or office.

A secretary is a person who performs myriad of daily chores that nibble away at an executive’s time (Onifade, 2010). The secretary coordinates the daily routines of an office and organizes the office schedule and paper work. The Secretary is an esteemed worker in the office amongst others who serves as the wheel of the business or organization to turn. although, the activities of the Secretary may be termed unproductive in the sense that they do not actually involve in the direct production activities, but it is also important to note that nothing can ever be produced without the effort of the secretary to gather, receive, store, and retrieving records for effective communication between the various units or departments and outsiders. Just as the office is described as the engine room or nucleus of any organization, so is the Secretary to the office. Shaw cited in Nwosu (2002) defines an office as any place where procedures concerned with the receipt, transmittal, production, reproduction; processing, storage and retrieval of information are carried out

habitually. The secretary plays an important role in the organization and national development in the sense that the secretary is involved in the work of the office which involves the collection of information, the sorting, processing, classifying, recording of information and the interpretation of information, diffusion of information and the prediction of the business including safe guarding of its assets, (Nwosu 1997).

The role of the secretary towards the working of every organization and contribution to national development cannot be over accentuated. Though the occupational title of the professional secretary is populated and treated with levity due to the mixed understanding of who is a professional secretary. This has made most people to call any one who sits at the entrance of an office having knowledge of the computer with typing skill learned at road side computer training Centre as a secretary, which ought not to be so because that person is just an office worker who possibly has mastery of one of the numerous qualities and skills a secretary- has or should be called a typist, probably due to ignorance of not knowing who actually is a secretary. This misconception and numerous management functions effectively undertaken in the office necessitated the nomenclatural change of secretarial studies to Office Technology and Management.

From the exposition of the concept and its origin it is clear that the Secretary is a highly principled and skilled individual that operates in the management team. As a purposefully trained and well-grounded individual in secretarial skill and administrative functions, the role of the secretary is multifaceted one and cannot be regimented to one area of administrative activities (Ugoji 2006). Recognizing the sensitive nature of the secretarial position in an organization, and because so much trust is imposed on him by employers, clients and the public emphasized the need for the secretaries to be ethical becomes very paramount. Ezenwafor and Okeke (2012) highlighted the functions of a secretary in an organisation to include among others:

- i. Using a variety of software packages, such as Microsoft word, outlook, power point, excel, access and so on to produce correspondence and documents and maintain presentations, records, spreadsheets and databases.
- ii. Devising and maintaining office systems
- iii. Booking rooms and conference facilities
- iv. Using content management systems to maintain and update websites and internal databases
- v. Attending meetings, taking minutes and keeping notes
- vi. Managing and maintaining budgets, as well as invoicing
- vii. Liaising with staff in other departments and with external contacts
- viii. Ordering and maintaining stationery and equipment
- ix. Sorting and distributing incoming mails and organizing and sending outgoing mails.
- x. Liaising with colleagues and external contacts to book travels and accommodation
- xi. Photocopying and printing various documents, sometimes on behalf of other colleagues.

V. Qualities of an Effective Secretary

The secretary needs to have certain qualities or attributes that will enable him to perform his duties with success. These qualities include but not limited to the following (Akpan, 2011).

1. **Confidentiality:** Secretaries must have the capacity to keep the confidential information secret.
2. **Reliability:** They should be reliable, trustworthy and dependable because they are the right hand persons to the office managers. They should be punctual, timely, honest and accurate in discharging their duties.
3. **Drive and initiative:** The secretary should be able to pick up the file, understand and determine what needs to be done and does it appropriately following instructions and procedures. He or she should have the initiative to learn new skills.
4. **Capacity to withstand work stress:** The secretary performs several administrative duties in an office and therefore should have the capability to withstand pressure associated with workload. He or she should have the ability to devise ways or means of attending to assigned tasks quickly and easily in order to meet set deadlines.
5. **Leadership:** The leadership quality of the secretary is usually necessary for the effective management of the office and to maintain order and decorum in the office. He should have the capacity to maintain good human relations with both office staff and visitors. He should be a good listener and should have the ability to explain issues to office staff so that a good understanding of their problems can develop. He should have the ability to develop in office staff a favourable attitude towards work.
6. **Flexibility and adaptability:** The secretary should have the ability to modify his/her behaviour to fit changing situations.
7. **Self-discipline:** The secretary should have self-restraint, emotionally stable and should be an embodiment of self-discipline. He should lead the office staff by showing good examples and not by precepts. In this way, the workers will see him or her as a model for emulation.
8. **Integrity:** The secretary should have sound moral integrity which involves fairness, tact, firmness, loyalty, dignity, honesty, prudence and sincerity in the discharge of his office duties.

VI. Professional Conduct of Secretaries

In any organization there is a code of conduct to guide the behaviours, attitudes, actions and reactions of members in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities. The phrase Professional conduct as used here refers to a set of rules and regulations about the general behaviour of the Secretaries in the office. It is the general behaviour expressed in actions, reactions or inactions by an entity. Therefore, a Professional conduct is a set of principles, rules and social norms provided by an organization to guide the conduct and behaviour of members toward goal attainment.

Kaptein and Wempe (2002) defined professional conduct as a policy document which defines the responsibility of stakeholders and the conduct expected of employees. Stevens (1996) defined it as a document that articulates the ethical parameters of an organization - what is expected and what is not. It can be regarded as a set of principles adopted by an organization to assist members in understanding the difference between right and wrong and in applying that understanding in carrying out their daily duties. The International Federation of Accountants (2007) provided a working definition for professional conduct as: "Principles, values, standards or rules of behaviour that guide the decisions, procedures and systems of

an organization in a way that (a) contributes to the welfare of its key stakeholders. (b) respects the rights of all constituents affected by its operations”.

This definition is all embracing because a professional conduct should not only specify how members should behave, it should also specify the benefits that will accrue to members and the rights of members should also be protected by the code of conduct. Therefore, the professional conduct of any association or organization should not only precipitate the ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ but should also specify how to take care of the welfare of members. A professional conduct contains open guidelines describing desirable behaviours and restrictive statements prohibiting other behaviours such as bribery and conflict of interest. It is a working document provided by an organization to shape the members’ behaviours through explicit statements of acceptable conduct.

The rationale for professional conduct includes the following

1. It enhances social responsibility and clarifies the norms and values a profession wants to uphold.
2. It sets the tones for the profession.
3. It serves as a reference document for decision making.
4. It clarifies the mission, values and principles of a profession and link them with professional conduct.
5. It provides a strong ethical climate for a profession.
6. It provides visible guidelines for behaviour.
7. It serves as a tool to encourage discussions of ethics and helps to improve how employees/members deal with ethical problems they encounter in their place of work.
8. It helps to create a positive public image of an organization.

In the discharge of their duties and responsibilities as key players in the organization, all secretaries should:

1. Always conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the good reputation of the organization.
2. Seek always to perform their duties in accordance with rules and regulations governing the operation of the organization and the association in which they are members.
3. Not be partial in their dealings with staff and other stakeholders and use all reasonable effort to perform their official duties without fear or favour.
4. At all times, exercise in the utmost good faith and act responsibly with honesty, tact, fairness and diligence and with reasonable care in the discharge of the duties of their office.
5. Be conversant with or knowledgeable of the rules and regulations of meetings, meeting procedures, quorum requirements, voting rights and proper administration of meetings.
6. Assist and advice office managers to ensure at all times that effective system of internal controls for proper record keeping is maintained.
7. Not be a member of any secret society or be involved in their activities.
8. Not give or accept bribe to influence the discharge of their official duties.
9. Ensure at all times that information regarded as confidential in offices should not be released to unauthorized persons or authority unless authorized by the super-ordinate. Similarly, personal data

of staff and other stakeholders considered “sensitive” by the authority, collected, held and processed in any medium including computer, online and in structured and unstructured manual files should not be communicated to other persons or group of persons unless required to do so by law or with the consent of the individual concerned.

10. Work with their superiors to ensure that there is a level of security put in place to ensure appropriate protection of staff personal data processed in the organization.
11. Refrain from involving in any illegal activity that may be in conflict with the interest of the association or which will jeopardize their ability to perform objectively their duties and responsibilities in the organization.
12. Be prudent in the use of information acquired in the course of their duties. Confidential information entrusted in their hands should not be used for any personal gain or in a manner that will be damaging to the reputation of the organization or the association.
13. Continually strive for improvement in the proficiency and effectiveness of their service.
14. Exercise self-discipline and restrain at all times and deal politely with staff and visitors.
15. Not used unauthorized people to perform official duties and should not use official hours or the office for private business.
16. Not aid or abet any malpractice and should adhere strictly to the laws and regulations of the organization.
17. Not mutilate, expunge, conceal, alter or forge official documents or data, abet or aid others do so.
18. Always be ready to accept responsibilities and discharge them creditably.

VII. Ethics of the Secretarial Profession

It has been observed that every profession has its code of ethics stipulated to guide the behaviors of its members. The Secretarial profession is not an exception knowing the nobility and esteemed nature of the profession. It also has ethics which stipulates acceptable standard for its members. Ugoji (2006) described the ethics of professional secretary as those moral principles relating to the job of the Secretary which he is obliged to accept upon receiving the appointment and so one is expected to uphold them at all times. Therefore, an ethical secretary is one who conforms to the moral standard of conduct of his profession, relating to dealing with or capable of making the distinction between right and wrong conduct. An ethical secretary behaves in a way that ensures that all its actions, decisions conform to the professional principles. According to Agholor, S. I., and Agholor, P.A. (2020), some of the ethical demands on the professional secretary include:

Confidentiality: A secretary should be able to keep confidential matters secret. He should also be able to protect and secure the office. All confidential matters must be kept confidential. Careless discussions must be avoided as such could lead to involuntary disclosure of official secrets. The secretary should resist commenting or passing remarks on official issues.

Honesty: The standard of honesty expected of the secretary is as high as, if not higher than that, of an accounting officer. He should be transparent in all his dealings as anything on the contrary would adversely affect his reputation and integrity.

Loyalty: Be loyal to your boss and your organization at all times. At all costs, do not sell them out. Your employer, on the other hand, must demonstrate that he is deserving of your trust. Do not get caught up in the office gossiping. If you display your loyalty you will receive the same in return.

Reliability: This shows you are reliable. Be punctual for work and meeting at all times and remember, always take the relevant documentation with you to the meetings. Ensure every task you are given is completed on time and to the best of your ability.

Responsibility: Prove you are responsible by setting priorities and carrying out tasks in a timely manner. Always meet deadlines when they are given. Your boss puts higher confidence in you. Write yourself a “to do” list even if its priority changes 10 times a day. Do not delegate if the job cannot be done as efficiently and accurately as you would have done it. If you delegate, always check that the project is on track time wise. Do not just forget about it because someone else is doing it.

Flexibility: Always prepare for change with the normal schedule of work. The best jobs are where you have a give and take arrangement. You do not know when you may require a change from your normal schedule or when you will need some time off.

Cooperative: Be willing to help and share your professional knowledge with colleagues when the situation calls for it, but know when to politely decline.

Politeness: One of the most cherished qualities of a secretary is politeness. He must be polite at all times and must never allow pressure or the complex nature of her job affects his dealings with other people. He must wear a cheerful look always and talk to people nicely, even when he is not happy.

Orderliness: The secretary should be organized at all times. He should plan his work in such a way as to achieve maximum result within a short time. Time should never be wasted on trivialities and he must never be jolted by pressure of work.

Tactfulness: The secretary should exhibit a great deal of tact in performing his duty. This becomes more essential in handling the public and when shielding his boss from unwarranted guests.

Punctuality: The ethics of the profession demands that the secretary must not only be punctual to his duty, but must make punctuality his watch-word on all occasions. He must be in the office before his boss so as to be able to organize the day’s work and bring up any outstanding matters before the arrival of his boss. He also leaves the office after his boss, to make sure that he clears his table of the day’s tasks.

Be Cooperative: Always assist and share your expertise knowledge with your colleagues wherever it is possible. Always carry out duties happily. Also know when to say no (gently) and explain why you cannot do the task asked of you.

Good Dressing: This has recently gained increased importance due to organizations’ quest for competitive advantage. Secretaries should therefore dress corporately and smartly always.

In addition to these ethical demands on the secretary, he should maintain good human relations in his organization, relating well with all and sundry in the spirit of team working which is essential tool for high organizational performance. He must relate with workers in his Unit in a manner that portrays him as having the mandate and authority of his boss.

VIII. Unethical Practices of Workers in Nigerian Organizations

Today, many African Nations are faced with the crisis that is making the competitive strength of the business organization more challenging (Kehinde 2006). This unethical behavior by employees permeates every level of the organization. Akinbayo, (2000) opined that employees indulge in stealing company's product and using company's service without authorization. There is a great concern of the quality of ethical conduct in all organization all over the world in which Nigeria is not an exemption (Kolade 1999).

Romance in the office: There is no doubt that every working class person spent more reasonable hours of his time in the office than he does at home. Many workers spend a large percentage of their working hours to develop and maintain friendships with colleagues that last beyond office hours and sometimes even the job itself (Bruce 2008). There is no doubt, many workers sees the office as the most logical scene to engage in romance or hookup. The assumption is that fellow employees are better-off to share our goals and values than total strangers. Moreover, people tend to have a closer tie at work than they do in clubs, bars, and the Internet. Bruce posited that all these reasons may prompt people to pursue romance with a co-worker, an assistant, or boss. But there are many more compelling reasons why that should not be encouraged in the workplace.

Office romance causes more damages than the potential benefits. Reason being that most romantic relationships do not work out, if that is the case the implications is that when you lose the game of love at the office, you still have to face the other person day after day. That constant reminder of a relationship that didn't work out is a painful burden to bear, and human relations in the organization as well as the overall work process and productivity is hampered, This also affects the individual performance of employee, the reason is that the two parties are still compel to work in the same place(Bruce 2008). On the other hand, time that should have been committed to work is used on romance. Therefore, romance in the office is unethical and should be disabused.

Promotion favoritism: The recognized route or criteria for promotion in any functional organization has always been years of service and performance depending on the organizational policies and guideline for promotion. But it bits my imagination that in most organization those in the helm of affairs to appraise workers for promotion resort to discrimination in terms of races, cliques etc. this is an unethical behavior that must be disabused in organization.

Bribery/Gift: The issue of bribery or presentation of gift to buy favour from those in public offices is very pronounced in every organization especially Government. Honors, Awards, promotion etc. are no longer based on who deserves it but by who rubs my hand. As a result there is no hard work and healthy competition in the offices, because they rather prefer resorting to bribery. This is also the case in our Polytechnics.

Diverting of organizational resources for personal use: This is also another unethical practices seen in Nigeria organization, and is more pronounced in the public sector due to lack of probing and accountability on office holders in the public sector. Such practices like using fund meant to run public office to personal use.

Apart from the above listed unethical conducts in organizations, other common unethical practices that can be found in organizations which discourage office workers from them to enhance a better performance include; Information Mismanagement, Rumor Mongering, Trading in offices, Falsification of documents, Falsifying the number of hours worked, Embezzling money from organization, Making long distance calls on business line, Disregard of organisational policy, Failure to honor commitment, Inappropriate use of the computer, etc.

IX. Factors that Promotes Unethical Conducts

There are numerous contributing factors to unethical behaviours in the offices, some are reviewed below.

Managers/Leaders Influence: Leadership of organization to a great extent determines whether employees embrace company's values or not in their disposition. If managers and top leaders don't model ethical behavior or enforce rules fairly, employees lose trust in them. Studies also show that people are more likely to override their own ethical concerns if their manager doesn't share those concerns (Dori 2014). Harned revealed that survey results by Ethics Resource Center shows managers are responsible for 60% of workplace misconduct. Top managers are more likely to break the rules than lower-level managers, (National Business Ethics Survey).

Organizational culture: The culture of the organization stipulates the ethics of that organization, it is the totality of the organizational values, believes and policies put in place to guide its operations. If the rules and policies of the organization are loosed, and offenders are not due punished as stipulated. It encourages more unethical conducts in the office.

Rewarding of unethical conducts: The high tendency of committing unethical practices in work places is because of organizations failure to implement the rule in punishing violators squarely, but rather victimize good corporate citizens who blows whistle on organizational wrongdoing due to organization politics or cliques (Kehinde 2010). Jansen and Von-Glinow (1985) explain that “organizations tend to develop counter norms, accepted organizational practices, which are contrary to prevailing ethical standards, this act as discouragement to lots of office workers who due to their values are trying to be ethical”.

Pressure and Need force: It is observed that some of those unethical behaviors exhibited by workers are as a result of their need force that is needed to be met. This happen most often in organization where the welfare of its staff are neglected; where salaries and wages are not paid regularly or timely, workers earns below their responsibilities. Existing literatures on corporate illegality indicates that pressure and needs unmet forces organizational members to behave unethically and develop corresponding rationalizations.

X. Challenges of Ethical Secretaries in an Unethical Work Environment

Secretaries face a lot of challenges in their effort to carry out the onerous tasks and responsibilities conferred on them by the profession. For example they are expected by the profession to shield their bosses, and to do this effectively requires, sometimes, some level of unethical behaviour or practices. Secretaries tell little lies to protect their bosses, to save a delicate situation. For the secretary to tell an anxious casual visitor that the boss is not available to prevent the boss being distracted is one of such challenges of the profession. To smartly deceive the boss's wife and sway her away from entering her husband's office when the boss is playing amorously with a strange woman inside his office is yet another. But greater challenges confront the secretary when his Boss is grossly unethical. What does the secretary who is, as it should be, loyal to his Boss do if the Boss indulges in unethical practices? Does the Secretary continue to be loyal to the Boss? Does he boldly warn the boss of the consequences of such unethical practices, report his Boss to higher authorities, or resign his appointment in obedience to his conscience?

Secretaries by their professional calling usually work late in the office to ensure that their executives' tables are cleared or decongested of files that would have lingered untreated, and overflow into the next day's work. They also stay on receiving and keeping visitors for the boss even after office hours, especially when the boss is away but desires to meet with such visitors. This situation, for most secretaries, could be very tempting as it becomes difficult to resist possible sexual overtures from men during these uncontrolled moments. It takes strong will of the ethical secretary to wriggle out of this situation. Sometimes it could not be about sexual overture, but request on the secretary to divulge essential organizational secret. In these days of severe competition, organizations look out for ways of out-witting their competitors, even when their method of doing this is unethical. The challenges of a secretary in the performance of her job become more apparent during organizational restructuring which usually leads to downsizing. Every employee wants the secretary to secretly give information on the names of employees marked out for dismissal, termination, lay-off or put on redundancy. The secretary sees himself under pressure to do unethical things. The pressure is, in fact, part of the profession. Obodo (2005) argued that the reason why secretaries face a lot of challenges is because of the proliferation of professional Associations for Secretaries.

XI. Challenges of Secretarial Practices in Nigerian Polytechnics

Poor funding of education: The Nigerian educational system has been plagued by poor funding for several years now because of unstable economy. This has affected all aspects of Polytechnic management. As a result, many offices in Nigerian Polytechnics do not have enough modern automation for effective office administration and data processing. In some offices, secretaries still utilize the traditional methods in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities. This has led to waste of time, effort and delay in meeting deadlines.

Corruption: This societal malady is eating deep into the Polytechnic system. There is massive corruption and looting of educational funds thereby truncating the educational system. Ayeni, Isah, Erwat and Heuma (2009) state that stealing of equipment and over invoicing of purchases still persist in the school system. They further maintain that where funds are not looted, they are diverted to other areas such as incidentals,

travelling expenses and hosting of unproductive events not included in the Polytechnic budget. These acts negatively affect the provision of modern office facilities for effective job performance.

Poor Maintenance Culture: Some Managements of Polytechnics do not have the ability to maintain office machines, equipment and other facilities provided in offices. This is as a result of poor maintenance culture and lack of funds for maintenance. This adversely affects secretarial duties and data processing.

Inadequate Capacity Development: Many Polytechnic secretaries are not adequately trained on the use of modern office facilities in the performance of their duties. Some of them learn through trial and error. Therefore, the available office facilities cannot be effectively utilized.

Inadequate Provision of ICT Facilities in Offices: In modern offices, secretarial duties and data processing are facilitated by the use of internet facilities such as e-mails, fax, extranets and intranets and computers. Unfortunately, some offices in the university system lack these facilities. Where they are available, they are not connected to the internet for quick communication. Some offices still use manual typewriter for data/information processing.

Hazards: The use of modern office equipment by officers is not without hazards. Continuous straining of the eyes on the screen of a computer affects the eye pupil and this has resulted to many computer operators using eye glasses.

Computer phobia: This term is associated with anxiety about learning to use computers or not being able to learn to successfully use computers. Some office workers in the country are still fearful of the use of computers. Some are intimidated by computers and are reluctant to use them in office operations in schools despite the numerous advantages associated with the use of computers in office administration.

Epileptic power supply: The supply of electricity in Nigeria is very unstable and this affects effective use of modern office equipment. Sometimes, the supply is very erratic and prompt causing damages to the computers and other office equipment. This affects productivity and increases the cost of maintenance.

XII. Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been seen from the logical presentations that ethical secretaries face a lot of challenges in the performance of their job in the organization. Problem situations confront them that require unethical approach as solution; how they maneuver the situations and come out still ethical is what makes the difference in their practice. The work environment under which secretaries work is yet another challenging factor. When work environment is unfriendly and unethical an up-right worker finds it difficult to perform optimally. Human relations practice in this situation is at its lowest ebb – team working, mutuality, comradeship, free flow of communication and other ingredients that make people work co-operatively together suffer a serious setback. Secretaries in their unique function of dedicated service to their executives become helpless. He must shield her boss in almost all circumstances to retain his confidence.

It could be concluded that professional ethics and moral standards are a worldwide phenomenon which has become so crucial for every employees and employers of labour to keep tab on. It is a critical issue for

organizations, and corporate executives must take aggressive actions to address it. Unethical office practices have cost organizations the ability to improve their performance. But in all, there is always light at the end of the tunnel. We saw situations that proved that remaining ethical in the midst of unethical work environment is a great advantage and reward to the secretaries who persevered and kept fate with their professional calling and personal integrity. There is therefore bright prospects for secretaries who, at all odds, remain ethical in their practice.

The following recommendations are therefore made to foster professionalism in the secretarial profession.

- i. Organization should create ethical awareness, encourage ethical reasoning, support ethical actions, provide ethical leadership, publicize organizations ethical value so that workers and customers clearly understand them and reward ethical behaviors
- ii. Management of the organization should show ethical examples by avoiding office politics, respect privacy, practice empathy, avoid rumor mongering and criticize ideas not people.
- iii. Although executives appreciate their ethical secretaries, efforts should be made to translate the appreciation into a more visible accolade in the organization so as to make other workers take challenge and start to imbibe the virtues of uprightness.
- iv. Organizations should endeavor to regularly send their secretaries to further training and be abreast with ethical standards required of them in carrying out their duties in order to enhance their productivity optimally.
- v. Knowing the sensitive nature of the secretarial profession and considering the ethics of the profession, it is imperative that graduates from the Polytechnics who studied Office Technology and Management be made to take oath of office just as it is done in some other field of study like Medical profession, etc.
- vi. Office Technology and Management Departments in Polytechnics should intensify training of their students with continuous emphasis on application of professional ethics in delivery of office functions as contained in the OTM curriculum.

References

- Adeyemo, D.O. and Salami, A. (2008). 'A review of privatization and public enterprises reform in Nigeria', *Contemporary Management Research*, 4(4), 401-418.
- Adebayo, M., (2012). Applied Office Administrative Procedure and Business Communication. Onitsha: Africana First Publishers, PLC.
- Adeyinka, A.O. (2014). Ethical Issues in Public Service. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 4(5).
- Agholor, S. I., & Agholor, P.A. (2020). Influence of application of professional ethics on job effectiveness of secretaries in Delta state polytechnics. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education (NIGJBED)*, 7(1), 333-340.
- Akinbayo, A. A. (2000). Professional Codes of Ethics and Management Excellence. *Nigerian Institute of Management*; Vol.40. 5-6.
- Ayemi, A. O., Isa, E. A., Erwat, E. A. & Ileuma, S. (2009). Managing inventions in Nigeria through educational research, innovations, creativity and policy reforms. In J. B. Babalola, G. O. Akpa, N.

- Ikediegwu, A. O. Ayeni & A. I. Atanda (Eds.) *Managing Inventions in the Nigerian Educational System*. Ibadan, Nigeria: His Lineage Publishing House
- Azuka, E.B. & Agomuo, E.E. (1993) *Modern Secretarial Duties for Polytechnics*, Aba, Model Academic Publisher Limited
- Azuka, E. B. & Azuka, M. O. (2006) *Office Practice and Management*, Oko, Dataword Computers Academy.
- Braimoh, M.Z. (2017). Professional ethics in the workplace. Safmos publishers: Ibadan.
- Bruce W. (2008). *The Ethics of Office Romance: Companies & Industries*.
- Dori M. (2014). *Creating an Ethical Workplace* .
- Eni, O. O. (1999). *Business and Secretarial Ethics for Managers and Secretaries*, Owerri, Springfield Publishers.
- Ezenwafor, J. I. & Okeke, A. O. (2012). Retraining university secretarial staff for effectiveness in the work environment of the ICT Era. *International Journal of Educational Research and development*. 4(1), 130-136.
- Ikelegbe, S. (2018). Business ethical practice and sustainable national development in Nigeria. *Nigeria Journal of Association of Business Educators of Nigeria*. 5(2), 316- 323.
- Ilori, Y. and C. Joseph, (1994). 10 characteristics of professionalism. Small-business-chron.com > Small Business > Human Resources > professionalism, accessed 7th July, 2023.
- Imhonopi, D. and Urim, U.M. (2013). 'Leadership crisis and corruption in the Nigerian public sector: An albatross of national development', *The African Symposium*, 13(1), 78- 87, June 2013.
- International Federation of Accountants (2007). *Defining and Developing an Effective code of Code for Organizations*. Available online: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/code_of_conduct. Accessed 29th September, 2023.
- Kagara, H.S. (2009). 'Oronsaye's Civil Service reform: Another Option', Retrieved, September 05, 2023 from <http://economicconfidential.net/new/features/4--oronsayes-civil-service-reformanotheroption>
- Kaptein, M. & Wempe, J. (2002). *The balanced company. The theory of corporate integrity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kehinde O. J. (2010). Effects of ethical behaviour on organizational performance: Evidence from three service organizations in Lagos, Nigeria. *Journal of Research in National Development*, 8,(1).
- McQuerry, L. (2013) Principles of professionalism. (Online) Available: <http://work.chron.com/principles-professionalism-14174.html> [20/09/2023]
- National Board for Technical Education (2004). *Curriculum and course specifications for ND/HND OTM programme*. Kaduna: NBTE.
- Nwosu B.O (1997). *Secretarial duties, a book of reading*. Cannon Publishers Nigeria Limited Owerri.
- Nwosu B.O (2002). *Office management in Nigeria*. 2nd Edition. Barloz Publishers, Inc. Owerri
- Oborah, J. O. (2011). *Basic ICT skill and keyboarding for office technology and management*. Lagos: Adura Publishers.
- Onifade, A. (2010). The indispensable secretary. *Journal of Social Science*. 22(1), 47-51.
- Popkin, R.H., and Stroll, A. (1979). *Philosophy made simple*. London; a Howard & Wyndham co.
- Segunda, F. (2019). Secretarial and office professional ethics. Accessed on the 10th of July 2023 from www.secretarynowadays.blogspot.com
- Ugoji I.E (2007). *Contemporary office ethics*. Published in Dokus press, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.