Factors Constraining the Role of Personal Secretaries in Selected Public Organizations in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study dealt with factors constraining the role of personal secretaries in selected public organizations in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The study used the qualitative approach through case study design. A sample of 30 participants was adopted including 10 from the College of Business Education, six from Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology, six from Medical Store Department and eight from Tanzania Buildings Agency. The researchers used in-depth interviews and documentary reviews as sources of data. The interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes to capture opinions, beliefs and attitudes about constraints that personal secretaries faced in executing their daily operations. The analysis involved the content analysis approach. The study concludes that personal secretaries faced numerous challenges, which constrain their job. Such challenges include communication constraints, records and documentation, customer related constraints and guidance and counselling constraints face personal and administrative secretaries. These constraints hindered them to perform their duties better, hence leading to negative image of their organizations. Based on the conclusions, employers need to set a portion of budget in their offices for secretaries to attend both on-the-job and off-the-job training to refresh their soft skills on both communication and emerging technologies. Administrators need to motivate and respect the work of personal and administrative secretaries by providing good office spaces and modern equipment. They also need to refresh their guidance and counselling capacities by conducting regular seminars and workshops, which will sharpen their performance and bring glory to respective institutions.

Keywords: Personal secretaries; constraints; Public Institution; organizations.

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Introduction

Personal secretaries contribute significantly to the achievement of organizational goals, the provision of accurate information and the promotion of the companies' image (State, 2015). Secretaries in public organizations can play an important role in improving the organizational performance by ensuring adequate communication, maintaining social interactions, adhering to codes of conduct and behaviour and demonstrating technical competence (Adam, 2015). They can also ensure service delivery to customers and employers by maintaining positive attitude toward people, dealing

with people with respect and good interpersonal relationship and by reflecting a high moral standard, among other things (Harcourt & Mnim, 2015; Myers et al., 2007).

Secretariat services are all activities produced by people who support the office, people, officers and office functions (Cisl, 2013). Personal secretaries or assistants are individuals who schedule appointments, provide information, make decisions, record and note incoming mail, locate and attach files to correspondence, compose and type routine correspondence and arrange travel schedules and reservations (Oware et al., 2016). Adam (2015) defined a secretary as a distinct job apart from typists, junior stenographers or stenographers. When performing their duties, secretaries apply their professional knowledge, skills, procedures, and work methods to improve the organizational performance (State, 2015). They perform office tasks on behalf of their immediate officers (Ayandele & Adeoye (2010)). As a result, the size and nature of the organization, the status of the boss, the ability and willingness to delegate work, level of education, emotional material and stability, to name a few factors, may have an impact on their performance.

The majority of public officers rely on secretariat services to keep their jobs stable (Oware et al., 2016). In this case, personal secretaries play an important role in the public sector. In general, secretaries use available communication channels to ensure effective delivery of service on time and in a peaceful and harmonious manner (Nassazi, 2013; Oware et al., 2016).

The majority of secretaries experiences various challenges such as office tools and equipment malfunctioning which causes service delay to customers (State, 2015). Secretaries, in particular, are in charge of making communication services available. They accomplish this by ensuring that adequate communication networks are in place to reach target points (Moriarty, 2015). Furthermore, they facilitate human interaction, coordination and integration. They assist visitors who appear to be meeting with the office (Harcourt & Mnim, 2015). They also offer basic advice, counselling and rules to those in need of assistance (Adam, 2015; Myers et al., 2007). Furthermore, they shape the company's image and reputation (Akpomi & Ordu, 2009). Finally, they perform administrative tasks such as typing, manual data entry, filing, scheduling and

report generation (Adam, 2015). With this emphasis, it is reasonable to conclude that administrative secretaries are important persons in organizations.

Based on the facts stated above, the Tanzanian government has taken several steps to ensure smooth operations of secretaries in their workplace. For example, the government has enacted labor laws and strategies to ensure safe working environments in public sector organizations (URT, 2015).Furthermore, through improved working environment, the government has managed to minimize and reduce employee conflicts in service delivery as workers find themselves in safe and attractive working environments that facilitates efficient service delivery (Babeiya, 2011).

In order to enforce employment standards, the government of Tanzania established the Employment and Labour Relations Act [principal legislation], as well as employers' associations and federations (Salum, 2017). It also established various acts to spell out organizational and employee duties and rights in the workplace in order to improve working conditions and encourage people to work and achieve organizational goals smoothly. Unfortunately, despite the critical role of personal secretaries in the public sector and the Government of Tanzania's initiatives to maintain a stable working environment, their consented works are highly dissatisfied, with some top management viewing them as non-helpers rather than facilitators of their office works (Ngotngamwong, 2019). This has resulted in negative perceptions, given that most office activities rely on administrative or personal secretaries' support (Adam, 2015; State, 2015).

Unfortunately, despite the critical role played by personal secretaries in the public sector, their work has been constrained in numerous ways such that in several cases, some top management officers do not value the role played by this cadre while others take secretaries for granted and hence creating complicated environment for them to take their duties effectively (Ngotngamwong, 2019). This has resulted in poor work output and demotivation among secretaries, poor customer care in offices and absence from duties, to mention but a few (Kiprono et al., 2017). Several scholars that attempted to study issues regarding personal secretaries mainly concentrated on their benefits in offices (Nassazi, 2013; Harcourt & Mnim, 2015;

Oware et al., 2016). There is dearth in literature in the Tanzanian context regarding what constrains personal secretaries from taking their duties smoothly amid different top management perceptions on position of personal secretaries in public organizations. Contradicting stances by top management on who secretaries are in their offices and the presence of different lamentations from secretaries on their roles being constrained by different factors on different angles prompted this study. Therefore, this study intended to explore factors constraining the role of personal secretaries when carrying out their duties in selected public institutions and organizations in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Literature Review
Empirical Literature Review
This section presents critical review of the literature on factors that constraint the role of personal secretaries in the public sectors.

Research shows that personal and administrative secretaries are a very important cadre in both public and private offices (Plattner & Mberengwa, 2010; Olayanju, 2018). Secretaries play many roles in offices such as facilitation of office meetings, communication, record keeping and guidance (Zhang, 2015). The roles performed by this cadre make secretaries critical and key personalities in any organization (Olayanju, 2018).

In general, personal and administrative secretaries have been reported to face a number of challenges or constraints in performing their duties as identified by various studies. For instance Ngotngamwong (2019) explains that regardless of the importance of personal or administrative secretary roles in organizations, some managers consider them as inefficient, so they need to examine their work regularly to satisfy themselves with correctness of those tasks. This situation constrains the roles of this cadre as it causes them lack enough confidence to undertake their duties independently (Zhang, 2015).

According to Olayanju (2018), new technology marks the introduction of new office equipment, which simplify work and do record keeping activities. Technology has made secretarial duties easy because it helps them to perform various activities at the same. These activities include typing, saving, printing, scanning documents and communication through emails and other social media. Technology, on the other hand, has jeopardized secretarial jobs as many offices are hiring candidates with computer knowledge who in other ways round perform duties that secretaries were supposed to do (ASUSD, 2012). Technical expertise has constrained the role of administrative and personal secretaries since technology requires them to check various machines and work on default parts in some instances. Unfortunately, many secretaries are not conversant with technical issues. They face difficulties to perform their work when computers and other machines fail to work properly. They also fear to leak information by using technological devices as a means of communication (Zhang, 2015).

Furthermore, Kiprono et al. (2017) considered communication ability among major constraints that prevent personal secretaries from carrying out their duties properly. Many secretaries face challenges to multilingual skills and thus they fail to communicate clearly with external customers who speak other languages than English and Kiswahili. This may hinder or delay service provision and customer satisfaction.

There is a tendency where some officers conduct frequent office transfers and reallocations among personal secretaries in order to make them not to stay in one office for so long. Main reason for this is to ensure secretaries remain confidential and fail to communicate important office information to outsiders who may threaten data and information securities of organizations. The study by Plattner and Mberengwa (2010) indicated that stress is very common in employees at lower levels of workplace ranks such as secretaries who have less control over their work situation. Having a stress at work place constrains the ability to perform well and achieve desired organizational goals (Kingsley & Chinasa, 2019).

Furthermore, Zuin and Findlay (2014) indicated that constraints secretaries faces are more or likely the same globally. In Nigeria, for, instance, secretaries reported that their roles is constrained by the public disclosure of vital information, whereby they are directly condemned to participate in the process. This discourages secretaries who are loyal and ethical as some bosses are the ones who tend to disclose vital information but when rumors are heard, secretaries bear the blames (Chioma et al., 2017). Similarly, there is a claim that secretaries are accountable for corruption and bribery, especially in very busy offices. Some customers becomes tired of

bureaucratic procedures of accessing services, which make them to opt for offering a bribe to secretaries so as to get priority in receiving immediate service at the company or institution (Oware et al., 2016; Chioma et al., 2017). According to Adam (2015), other constraints to personal secretaries include career progression, whereby many are not given priority to advance their knowledge and sharpen their skills. Secretarial training offered by some institutions do not match with current institutional set up and requirements as well as changes that happens with technology. This has made majority of secretaries unemployable due to lack of soft skills and knowledge towards a rapid changing technological work environment (Kingsley & Chinasa 2019).

In Ghana secretaries reported that they face many challenges in performing their work such as inadequate office space which hindered them to arrange their offices and work properly. In some cases, the office space of secretaries are very limited with a lot of files or machines, and this make them feel uncomfortable with work environments (Adam, 2015; Adegboyega & Ufuoma, 2020).

In Kenya, personal secretaries have not been carrying out their duties smoothly due to various constraints they face such as poor technological skills as the result of requirement of computers and other sophisticated machines in public offices. This situation calls for more training on technical issues that may help secretaries to resolve minor technical challenges which do not requires the highest level of technical know-how (Kiprono et al., 2017).

Plattner and Mberengwa (2010) reported that in Botswana, secretaries are constrained by many stressors such as working outside their job description whereby some bosses used secretaries to perform their private activities rather than performing official duties. Furthermore, lack of promotion opportunities demotivated secretaries in performing well in this cadre. In Brazil, secretaries reported to face difficulties especially when some of supervisors performed secretarial work, which stressed employees in this cadre since they felt undervalued. This tendency lowered secretarial job performance and demoralized their efforts towards achieving the organizational goals (Harcourt & Mnim, 2015).

Therefore, issues faced by personal secretaries are common across countries. It is out of this background that this study sought to establish factors constraining the role of personal secretaries in selected public organizations in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Methodology
Research Design
This study used a qualitative approach. By the use of this approach, the researchers interacted with participants and collected useful insights, opinions and perceptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. The qualitative approach aided in the exploration, explanation, discovery and comprehension of the constraints faced by personal and administrative secretaries. The approach allowed the authors to work closely with secretaries through direct contact as recommended by different scholars (Astalin, 2013; Wisdom & Creswell, 2013). To allow the researchers have in-depth interaction with participants, the case study design was used. The case study involves studying cases intently and in-depth to obtain concrete knowledge of the phenomenon. As articulated by Mohajan and Mohajan (2018), the researchers were successful in capturing the emotions, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of the studied case.

Population and Sampling
The researchers conducted this study in Dar es Salaam City. It involved four public institutions namely College of Business Education, Medical Store Department, Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology and Tanzania Buildings Agency. The researchers selected these institutions out of many because they are among the oldest public institutions and organizations, being in operation for a long time and having experienced secretaries who are knowledgeable about daily operations in that occupation. A sample size of 30 was adopted including 10 from the College of Business Education, six from Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology, six from Medical Store Department and eight from Tanzania Buildings Agency.

Research Instruments
The researchers used in-depth interviews and documentary reviews as sources of data. The interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes to capture opinions, beliefs and attitudes about constraints that personal secretaries faced in executing their daily operations.

Statistical Treatment of Data
The analysis involved the content analysis approach through which the researchers y managed to

analyse, summarize, arrange, organize and interpret the results.

Ethical Considerations

Due to involvement of human subjects, the researchers acquired a research permit from the local government authorities as well as from the institutions under investigation. The researchers ensured that names, identity and information provided by respondents remained confidential. The researchers did not disclose any name of respondents in the final report.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study guided by various themes as follows:

Communication Constraints

The study revealed some communication constraints that the secretaries went through in their daily operations. Study findings indicates that the secretaries faced communication challenges since they are incapable of multilingual skills. Particularly, respondents emphasized that lack of good communication skills made it more difficult to interact with customers, visitors and internal staff members. One of respondents acknowledged that,

> Many of us lacks required communication skills. In terms of language of communication, we are well conversant to Kiswahili, used as official language in public offices. Unfortunately, some offices use both Kiswahili and English as a means of communication and when comes a guest or a customer who speak a fluent English, many of us fail to communicate with them.

Another respondent added, "Some of visitors to our offices do not speak either English or Kiswahili; they speak other foreign language, which we are not aware of. …..In this case there must be a translator to help in communication unless we communicate using symbols." The responses correlates to study findings by Kiprono et al (2017) that communication ability is one of main challenges that prevent personal secretaries from carrying out their duties properly. Many secretaries face challenges to multilingual skills and thus they fail to communicate clearly with external customers who speak other languages than English and Kiswahili. This may hinder or delay service provision and customer satisfaction.

The study further discovered that modern communication facilities such as internet and social media constitute a challenge to some secretaries, especially those with difficulties in mastering modern technology as several respondents reported:

> Among our fellows especially those who are adult and nearly to retire, find it difficult to use modern technological tools in official communication. For example, they are not much comfortable with the usage of internet or social media in making official communication; they fear leakage of official information.

This corresponds to the study findings by Plattner and Mberengwe (2010), Zhang (2015) and Olayanju (2018) who reported similar challenges as technology seemed to increase stress to the work that secretaries performed and many of them feared the information security.

Reviewed literature encountered findings of Chioma et al. (2017) that secretaries are blamed by disclosure of vital official information, even if they are not the ones who leaked the information. This tendency happens because they are dealing with a lot of official information every day. This has been supported by responses of the interview that;

> In some instances, when vital information leaks, secretaries become the first persons to blame, considering that they handle important information. Our Supervisors forget that, secretaries work on the information that records management personnel has already viewed; this make us discomfort because we are aware of codes of conducts.

Another constraint was poor communication of instructions as evidenced by respondents who confirmed that lack of clear instructions to do some office functions.

> The majority of administrative bosses believe they are superior and lack the time to sit down with secretaries and provide them with instructions on the matters that pertain to their roles. Some of our bosses provides instructions in a manner that demotivates secretaries from performing their intended work.

Therefore, the established constraints may lead to job dissatisfaction as secretaries think that their bosses ignore the cadre. In response, secretaries should be given regular training on communication skills in order to promote their confidence, morale and job value (Kingsley & Chinasa, 2019).

Records and Documentation Constraints

Records and documentation was another challenges faced by secretaries under investigation. Particularly, lack of modern technological tools and equipment for proper handling and maintaining of official documents was a challenge among the secretaries. One of respondents revealed that, "Many offices still maintains and use old computers that have low functioning capacity. This situation has made secretarial work too tedious and demotivating. Many offices have disfunctioning printers and computers." Another respondent had this to share:

> It is difficult to maintain a record system if you rely solely on the current unstable internet services. When the office decides that everything be done through e-office, they have to invest more in technology, which includes purchasing enough bandwidth to support office activities, we fail to work properly when there is shortage of internet services. This cause delays in file movements and serving customers. Delays create blames to secretaries who have nothing to do with shortage of internet services.

Technology requires investment. To compete in business and general service provision needs smart purchase of modern tools and stable internet services to ensure provision of timely, quality and good services to internal and external customers. Organizations should support secretaries by investing in internet service that support their activities and reduce technostress among them (Kingsley & Chinasa, 2019).

Lack of timely and proper on-the-job training has been a constraint to secretaries in public offices. Priority to on-the job-training is given to employees of other cadres and secretaries are considered only in last opportunities, which makes them feel neglected, demotivated and so they fail to comply with modern standards of records keeping and up-keeping of the office as stipulated by one respondent as follows:

> We are not given priority to job training; if any chance for training happens, priorities are given to employees of other cadres but not secretaries. If it happens that secretaries attends any training, it is after very long struggles and convincing to the management that the training is important and will add values to secretaries in performing their duties. Secretaries become obsolete on new ways or records keeping, communication and other relevant duties.

According to Nassaz (2013) employee training play a central role towards improving work performance and output. Secretaries should be given opportunities to both on-the-job training and off the job training to sharpen their knowledge and skills.

Customer-Related Constraints

The study revealed some challenges related to customers who played a role that hindered their service delivery. One respondent reported that:

> Some customers are harsh and they do not listen or agree with instructions given to them when they visit the office for services. They need first priority and they do not care about other customers in line. When you find such customer and advise them, few understand while some ignore the instructions and complain about secretarial bureaucracies. They forget that secretaries receive orders or instructions from their bosses or immediate supervisors; this embarrass and annoys.

Secretaries face difficulties in dealing with cruel customers who need to be served first regardless of procedures provided by the office. This situation leads to improper arguments between secretaries and customers. Few secretaries are able to tolerate disrespectful customers while majority of secretaries become annoyed and demoralized (Adegboyega & Ufuoma, 2020).

Guidance and Counselling Constraints

The study further revealed counselling related challenges as respondents declared that inadequate professional skills and knowledge to provide counselling and guidance to customers, visitors and internal employees was a critical problem among secretaries. Some secretaries are unable to guide customers when they require specific information. One of respondents had this to share:

Some secretaries lacks professional skills and knowledge on how to guide and counsel both internal and external customers. When customers approach your office, you should note that they need to be listened, guided and others need counselling. However, due to lack of enough knowledge and skills, some secretaries become harsh to customers and they distort the image of the organization…..this work requires a person with high passion and who can handle multiple customers and attend them well.

Secretaries requires trainings on soft skills to improve the way they interact, serve and deal with diverse customers (Nassaz, 2013). Therefore, employers should re-think on setting aside funds to undertake regular training to improve secretarial knowledge and skills about strengthening customer care in organizations. This constraint has made many secretaries think of changing profession as evidenced by secretaries in public offices who undergo further training either in public administration or human resources management. This is an indicator that secretaries are dissatisfied with harassment and even bullying inflicted against them in offices.

Conclusion and Recommendation
Conclusions
The study concludes that personal secretaries face numerous challenges, which constrain their job. Such challenges include communication constraints like failure to multilingual and grammatical difficulties. Another constraint has to do with records and documentation, resulted from poor technological equipment and usage, which lead to data and information leakage. Thirdly, there are customer related constraints, such as dealing with barbarous customers who do not adhere to instructions and office procedures when they need services in public offices. Finally, guidance and counselling constraints face personal and administrative secretaries. This hinders them to perform their duties better, hence leading to negative image of their organizations. Highlighted challenges have severe effects to organizations in terms of poor work performance.

Recommendations
Based on the conclusions, employers need to set a portion of budget in their offices for secretaries to attend both on-the-job and off-the-job training to refresh their soft skills on both communication and emerging technologies. This will cause them to handle official documents effectively. There is a need to improve working conditions for this important cadre. Administrators need to motivate and respect the work of personal and administrative secretaries by providing good office spaces and modern equipment. They also need to refresh their guidance and counselling capacities by conducting regular seminars and workshops, which will sharpen their performance and bring glory to respective institutions.

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