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## THE DIFFERENCES IN THE SECRETARIAL JOB FUNCTIONS AND COMPETENCIES BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR IN KINTA VALLEY, PERAK

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### Abstract

*This study was conducted to identify the differences of the secretarial job functions and competencies between public and private sectors in Malaysia. From the results obtained, the much needed changes to improve the implementations of public sector service and productivity are also examined and suggested for improvement. The scope of the study was the secretarial staffs in the public and private sector employed in Ipoh, Kinta Valley, Perak. The secretarial staffs' position in the public sector is under the title Administrative Assistant (Secretarial). A set of questionnaires consisted of close-ended questions was used to gather the needed information. The main instruments used for this study is the questionnaire. The questionnaires were tested for face and content validity. The questionnaires were personally distributed to all the respondents in the public and private sectors in Ipoh, Perak and specific time was given for them to answer them. From the results obtained via questionnaires, the finding shows that there are significant differences in the job functions and job competencies aspects between the public sector and private sector. Most of the respondents agreed regarding the significance of job qualification which consists of skills, knowledge and abilities (SKA's) to perform job functions. It was also found that several aspects such as the secretarial job governance are discussed and emphasized. Finally, the discussion retrieved from the data analysis suggested several recommendations include the perspective of change to the public sector from the relevant and revised entry level requirements, salary scheme restructuring, career advancement opportunities and the systems to improve and organized the secretarial job functions within the public sector organizations based on the successful story and criteria implemented by the private sector organizations.*

**Keywords:**Innovation on Secretarial Job Functions and Competencies, Entry Requirements, Career Advancement Opportunities, Change Management, Systematic and Sustainable Job Functions

### 1. Introduction

With the advent of office technologies in recent years, the secretarial job functions have widely expanded and showing increase responsibility not only to their job functions and competencies, hence also to their organizational commitment . A lot of articles today elucidate the essentiality of how the title "secretary" has expanded and growing; from the normal office assistant or managers assistant to the office manager and become one of the most important person in the organization. Hellerstein (1995) noted that secretaries working in pools support one or more departments and office technologies act as a bridge to mid-management jobs. Furthermore, their salaries and career opportunities now compete with other executive level positions. It clearly defined that secretarial functions were growing rapidly and encountered enormous changes. Unfortunately, the emergence of changes frequently occurred mostly in the private sectors which enable managers and professionals to operate more independently and the technology redefined the secretary's roles and career path.

Enormous comparison can identified with regards to the practices and implementation of the secretarial position between the Malaysia public sectors (i.e. Government Agency) and the private sectors. The private sectors offered the secretarial staffs with interesting salary schemes and opportunities due to the emerging variety of secretarial functions and tasks involving the office and organizations. Secretarial duties were not only limited to the basic traditional functions such as dictating and typing only, but they also performed managerial functions such as planning, organizing, directing and controlling in assisting the management. However, the Malaysian public sectors still overlook the evolution to these secretarial job functions.

The Malaysian public sectors classified the secretarial post as a clerical service with minimum job descriptions which can lead to unprofessional workforce. The entry requirements necessitate for this job is only SPM holder with minimum qualification. In fact the Shorthand/Trengkas speed tests are still the qualifying tests for acceptance into the public sectors. With reference to the spa.gov.my, the secretarial position still undertaken by the public sectors is Administration Assistant (Secretarial) with low salary scheme. The job specification enlisted dictation, typing and handling records as their main tasks.

## **2. Review on Secretarial Job Functions and Competencies**

### *2.1 Definition of Secretarial Job Functions and Competencies*

Secretarial job functions were defined as the list of tasks to perform the responsible and administrative duties for the supervisors. The secretary and administrative assistant also provide high level of administrative support for an office in the organizations. According to Raja Munirah (2001), the roles of administrative support personnel such as secretaries and administrative assistant have changed significantly recently due to the corporate downsizing, economy politics, workplace diversity and technology. The secretarial job functions have become wider, which several conventional job duties such as dictation and transcription have already diminished. The staffs were encouraged to participate in multiple tasks to reinforce their professionalism and skills. The title "secretary" also is slowly diminished and rise to more standard and high level position in the organization. Meanwhile, secretarial competencies referred to the listed requirements and qualifications that embodied the knowledge, skills and ability performing the secretarial jobs. (NCSC, 2008). The ability to acquire appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities in order to do the jobs has become essential necessity to enhance jobs effectiveness in recent era. However, in Malaysia there were differences in delivering and applying the information regarding job functions and also competencies between public and private sectors. It appeared that the public sectors are having very limited descriptions and demands regarding the functions and requirements of secretarial and administrative functions.

### *2.2 Entry Requirements*

According to spa.gov.my (2008), the entry requirements to enter the Administrative Assistant (Secretarial) positions in public sectors were to pass the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) with a minimum grade and the Shorthand/Trengkas skills. Furthermore, candidates who obtain a Diploma of Secretarial Sciences from local polytechnic also will be considered. Nevertheless, there are three (3) grades in these clerical schemes which are N17, N22 and N32, all the candidates will entered the jobs starting from the lowest grade, N17. Meanwhile, the entry requirements to apply the secretarial positions in the private sectors were more deliberate and demanding. The face of the workplace has changed dramatically with many job roles evolving over the years in tandems with developments in technology and marketplace demands. (Lim, 2007). Consequently, the private sectors demanded for a highly skills and experience secretary to perform various tasks in the organizations. Graduates from universities, colleges and experience workers are always desirable by the private sectors to fulfill the secretarial positions in their organizations. Many employers were preferred to hire graduates from the higher level institutional with an ability of typing and word processing skills.

### *2.3 Secretarial Jobs Requirements*

Lim (2007) once stated that the traditional arrangements of one secretary per manager becoming less evident today. Secretaries were now assigned to units and work groups; as such there was an even bigger need for secretaries to be collaborative team-players. Because of this bigger duty of this professional job, some of the organization already moves forward and implemented changes to the secretarial responsibilities and also to their job title. We could describe that this profession is one of the most fast growing professions nowadays. Besides, office automation had led the secretary to assume the responsibilities once reserved for the managerial and professional staffs. (US Department of Labor, 2007). The major responsibilities of the secretarial jobs still remains, the only difference was the job functions of the secretary were improved and enriched. Additionally, each of them was required to have a niche areas of expertise as the tendency to work in numerous industry occurred. As for examples, the legal secretaries were need to familiar with the terms and conditions used by lawyers and medical secretaries would have knowledge in the medical areas. The broad experience and knowledge in those fields will increase their values of employment. Moreover, the secretary already became knowledge workers (k-workers) as the demand of the informational labor that is capable of handling, synthesizing and creating new knowledge has grown, while space for traditional manual work, and has been reduced. (Pyoria, 2005)

#### 2.4 *Salary Scheme and Career Advancement Opportunities*

Employers needed to ensure salary sacrifice provision was treated as a contractual change and to put mechanism in place, so that employees are not “salary is scarifying themselves” below minimum wage levels. (Chris Bruce, 2007) There were bigger gaps between the salary obtained by the secretary and administrative assistant in public and private sectors.

#### 2.5 *The purpose of Change*

A huge gaps of the secretarial and administrative job functions and qualifications between public and private sectors in Malaysia, determined the need of change in the public sector. In the world of globalization and the high demand of the adaptable and versatile secretary and administrative staffs, the public sector must change. According to INTAN (1996), a key success factors towards the excellence in the public services are an excellent agency which are sensitive to the customer needs and make changes to increase customer satisfaction. It was identified that, the customers stated are the internal customers, which was the staffs. Public servants must be able to adapt with global thinking and the success of any change efforts depends on the degree of support given by the Head of Departments and Managers. Change is a key management responsibility. Managers must anticipated change, recognized change environment, convinced others of the need for change in the organizations and chart a positive and understandable course for change. This is an ongoing process necessary to maximize organizational performance. (Ronning, 2004).

### 3. **Methodology**

#### 3.1 *Research Design*

This research was a comparative study as it is established to test the comparison between two units of analysis. It is an approach that capable of embracing a wide range of possibilities in relation to the scope and specific focus of the study. (Brotherton, 2003).

#### 3.2 *Sampling Techniques And Sample Size*

The stratified random sampling was used. It was identified that there were 65 Administrative Assistant (Secretarial) with the salary scheme of N17, N22 and N32 were currently employed in Pejabat Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Perak. Meanwhile, the recognized private sectors that engaged in the legal businesses located around Ipoh, Perak were 102 companies. Refer to the unbalanced population between the public and private sectors, only 70 % of the population were used and the total samples of the study were 116, which 46 were the Administrative Assistant (Secretarial) with the salary scheme of N17, N22 and N32 and another 70 were the secretarial staffs employed in private sector.

### 4. **Result and Analysis**

#### Rate of Survey Return

Questionnaires were personally distributed to 135 respondents. 65 were the Administrative Assistant (Secretarial) Grade N17, N22 and N32 meanwhile another 70 were the Secretarial staffs in private sectors engaged in legal businesses in Ipoh, Perak. From this number of questionnaire distributed to the respondents of public sector, 30 questionnaires or 46% were received before the due date while another 10 questionnaires or 15% were received after the first follow up. Meanwhile, for the private sector, 45 questionnaires or 64% were received before the due date while another 15 questionnaires 21% were received after first follow up. The total questionnaires analyzed for the public sector were 40 out of 65 (61.5%) which consists of 20 questionnaires from Grade N17 staff, 8 questionnaires from Grade N22 staff and 12 questionnaires from Grade N32 staff. Furthermore, the total questionnaires analyzed for the private sectors were 60 out of 70 (86.5%) from various secretarial job titles.

#### Section B: Entry Level Requirements

##### Research Question 1

Descriptive Statistics of Relevant Entry Requirements in meeting the Job Functions

Table 4.10 above shows the overall summary of the descriptive statistical analysis for all statements involved in relevant entry requirement in meeting the job functions. Based on the 5-point scale used, the findings indicated that the range was between 2.56 to 3.67. The mean score for the relevant entry requirements was 3.111 ( $SD=2.482$ ). The mean score 3.0 represents that their perception towards the entry level requirement was

moderate. The moderate response from the respondents in Table 4.10 indicates that the existing entry requirements are not fully acceptable and agreed by the respondents; in the public sectors, the entry requirements seem to be irrelevant to the current needs of recruitment.

#### Section C: Secretarial Job Functions

##### Research Question 2

##### Descriptive Statistics of the Secretarial Job Functions

Table 4.11 shows the overall summary of the descriptive statistical analysis for all statements involved in the secretarial job functions in the public and private sector. The analysis involved the use of the minimum, maximum values, the mean, the median and the standard deviation scores. Based on the 5-point scale used, the findings indicated that the range was between 2.00 to 4.56. The mean score for the job functions was 3.5344 ( $SD=.97022$ ), which

represented that the respondents agreed that the secretarial job functions listed are important. From the respondents' opinion, they agreed to the listings of secretarial job functions given in the questionnaire, and majority of the public and private sectors respondents' awareness regarding the implementations and essentiality of the job functions to their daily work schedule are increased.

#### Section D: Secretarial Job Competencies

##### Research Question 3

##### Descriptive Statistics of the Secretarial Job Competencies

Table 4.13 shows the overall summary of the descriptive statistical analysis for statements involved in the secretarial job competencies in the public and private sector. The analysis involved the use of the minimum, maximum values, the mean, the median and the standard deviation scores. Based on the 5-point scale used, the findings indicated that the range was between 2.58 to 4.58. The mean score for the job competencies was 3.7458 ( $SD=.73510$ ), which represented that the respondents agreed that the secretarial job competencies listed are important.

#### Section E: Secretarial Job Governance

##### Research Question 4

##### Descriptive Statistics of Secretarial Job Governance

Table 4.15 above shows the overall summary of the descriptive statistical analysis for all statements involved in the secretarial job governance. As such the analysis involved the use of the minimum, maximum values, the mean, the median and the standard deviation scores. Based on the 5-point scale used, the findings in above table indicated that the range was between 2.40 to 4.60: the mean score for the secretarial job governance was 3.6980 ( $SD=.72780$ ). The mean score as above represented that the respondents agreed with the listed secretarial job governance in their organizations.

##### Research Question 5

##### Group Statistics for the overall Secretarial Job Functions

Table 4.17 shows the number of cases, mean value, standard deviation, and standard error for the secretarial job function between the public and private sectors. From the above table, it displays that the public sector respondent mean score is 2.3672 ( $SD=.21192$ ); they believed that the listed secretarial job functions such as meeting arrangement and report preparation are less important for them. Meanwhile, the private sector respondent mean score is 4.3125 ( $SD=.10228$ ); they believed that the listed secretarial job functions is important in their daily work.

##### Independent Samples T-Test

Table 4.18 shows the independent sample T-test to determine the differences between the secretarial job functions implemented by the public sector and private sector. In relation to the secretarial job function, Levene's Test was significant and so the unequal variance estimates are interpreted. Consulting the T-value, df and two-tail significance, again it shows that there was a significant differences. ( $p < .05$ ). That is, there are significant differences of the secretarial job functions between public and private sector – t (51).

##### Research Question 6

##### Group Statistics for the overall Secretarial Job Functions

From the table, it displays that the public sectors respondent mean score is 2.8632 ( $SD=.15485$ ); they are still uncertain about the secretarial job competencies. Meanwhile, the mean score for the private sectors was 4.3342 ( $SD=.10293$ ); they believed that the secretarial job competencies is important for them.

##### *Independent Samples T-Test*

Table 4.21 shows the independent sample T-test to determine the differences between the secretarial job competencies required in the public sector and private sector. In relation to the secretarial job competencies, Levene's Test was significant and so the unequal variance estimates are interpreted. Consulting the t-value, df and two-tail significance, again it shows that there was a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ), i.e., there are significant differences in the secretarial job competencies between public and private sector – t (62).

## 5. Conclusion

### Research Question 1

What are the secretarial entry requirements that appear to be relevant in meeting the job functions required by the public and private sectors?

It was found that the existence entry requirements to fill in the secretarial positions are not fully acceptable and agreed by the respondents. The mean score between the ranges of 2.56 – 3.67 shows their moderate responses and disagreement to several statements in the questionnaire. In this study, current entry requirements for the secretarial positions are listed to be responded and the moderate response shows that some of the requirements are not relevant to be practiced in both sectors

### Research Question 2

What are the levels of secretarial job functions among public and private sectors?

Majority of the respondents rated the high levels of importance (60%, n=60) towards the secretarial job functions. The traditional roles of the secretarial job functions are eradicated slowly and modernization takes place. The replacement from the stenography work into an executive job function shows that the respondents are aware of the needed secretarial job functions and their responsibilities. Administrative professionals now divide their time between traditional duties and newer functions. (USA Today, 1996).

### Research Question 3

What are the levels of secretarial competencies required by the public and private sectors?

It can be concluded that the respondents agreed with the list of required secretarial job competencies and qualifications which include the knowledge, skills and abilities entailed to perform the secretarial job functions in their organizations. Majority of the respondents rated the high levels of importance (60%, n=60) towards the secretarial job competencies

### Research Question 4

What are the levels of the secretarial job governance applied by the public and private sectors?

Majority of the respondents rated high levels of agreement for the secretarial job governance carried out in the organizations. 61%, n=61 agreed that the job governance involved in the implementation of the secretarial job functions are important and are being executed in their organizations. The practices of training for the career improvement and salary scheme enhancement are determined and the effectiveness of the training establishment seems to be very crucial to the workers efficiency and productivity. Training is increasingly conceived and promoted as a cooperative effort in which the various relevant institutions in the public and private sector works together whereby they must participate and share the responsibilities. (Wong, 1997)

### Research Question 5

Are there any differences in the secretarial job functions between public and private sectors?

It is found that there were significant differences of the secretarial job functions between public and private sector ( $p < .05$ ). The job functions were divided into five (5) sub divisions whereby, it illustrates the gap between public and private sector respondents regarding the secretarial job functions. Most of the public sector respondents had a lower agreement regarding the listed job functions. In contrast, the private sector respondents who think that the job functions are very important to their career

### Research Question 6

Are there any differences in the secretarial competencies between public and private sectors?

It was found that there were also significant differences in the secretarial job competencies between public and private sector ( $p < .05$ ). The secretarial job competencies were measured from the skills, knowledge and abilities (SKAs) to perform each of the job functions in the organizations. Usually, there are three (3) requirements that underlie job performance related to the secretarial functions. Majority of the respondents from the public sector gave lower rate responses to the qualifications needed to perform the secretarial jobs. From the findings, it is found that the private sector staff is more specific and realistic to ensure their jobs defensibility and also their understanding of what, why and how the work is done are more deliberate rather than public sector staff.

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