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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine what secretaries perceive their training needs to be, and to determine how those training needs might be related to various demographic variables of the individual secretary. A questionnaire was developed that included the majority of skills that could be taught in a training session for secretaries. Thirty-six university and private industry secretaries ranked the items as being of "no benefit" to "highly beneficial" on a scale of 1 to 4 and also included their experience, tenure, job training, education, age, and job types. It was found that only a few secretaries believed that training in typing or shorthand would be beneficial, probably because these skills are prerequisites for being hired. Training on a word processor was viewed by most as a highly important training need, followed in rankings by interpersonal communication, grammar, and business correspondence. It was also found that secretaries did not want to interrupt their personal time to attend training programs. Several relationships between demographic variables and perceived training needs were found to be negatively correlated. For 'example, the more education secretaries had, the less they saw a need for training in most of the basic components. Length of experience was found to be negatively correlated with perceived training needs for dictaphone machine or copying equipment. It was recommended that a larger and more diverse sample of secretaries be used in further studies of secretaries' training needs. (KC)

AN ANALYSIS OF

SECRETARIAL TRAINING NEEDS

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AN ANALYSIS OF SECRETARIAL TRAINING NEEDS*

Introduction

Several recent articles have indicated a trend toward secretarial shortages in both the public and private sectors (Balsley, 1979; Seixas, 1980).

In addition, of the women who are entering the field as new secretaries, the great majority of them lack certain basic secretarial skills (Seixas, 1980).

The reason for a lack of manpower to fill secretarial positions seems to be that women are finding that they can excel in many other job areas that were once considered "for men only." Many of these alternative jobs require significantly less training and pay much higher salaries (Seixas, 1980).

As women continue to diversify in their occupational objectives, the trend of lesser trained secretaries entering the job market can only increase (Balsley, 1979). Even high school and college curriculums seem to be moving away from the traditional courses offered "secretarial types" such as shorthand and filing procedures.

Organizations are beginning to feel the need to train secretaries prior to giving them full job responsibilities. Not only does the new recruit need training, but so do many of the older experienced secretaries. With the ongoing advancement of technology in office equipment that is presently taking place, many organizations are finding they must train old experienced secretaries in order to maximize the efficiency of expensive new equipment.

The Occupational Outlook Handbook, printed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, describes secretaries as workers who:



^{*}The authors would like to thank Robert Kosub, Dwayne Barber, and John Ross for the work and insight they contributed to this project.

relieve their employers of routine duties so that they can work on more important matters. Although most secretaries type, take shorthand, and deal with callers, the time spent on these duties varies in different types of organizations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1978).

In essence, what the experts are saying is that the title "Secretary" is a catch-all phrase that may refer to persons employed as file clerks to persons working as administrative assistants. Because of this diversity, it is difficult to get very specific about the training needs of secretaries as a whole.

Ment, there is little that deals directly with secretarial needs (Hackey, 1980; Hilliard, 1977). In fact, there is a scarcity of empirical data available that gives insight into the secretarial situation. Most articles include broad generalizations made only from personal observation or speculation.

It was the purpose of this study to provide a more systematic understanding of secretaries and the types of training that they believe to be important. Specifically, this study attempted to: 1) determine what secretaries in general perceive their training needs to be; and 2) determine how those training needs might be related to various demographic variables of the individual secretary.

Methods

After reviewing the literature of several secretarial training assessment programs (Mehallis & Fair, 1979; Rudnitzky, 1980) and discussing with a number of secretaries their job duties, a questionnaire was developed which included the majority of skills that could be taught in a training session for secretaries. The skills were: typing, grammar, shorthand/dictation, filting procedures/record keeping, business correspondence, interpersonal communication, in-house communication, telephone communication, receiving and screening visitors, and equipment skills including the word processor, copy-



•

ing equipment, dictaphone, and telephone. Secretaries rated their need for training on each of these items. Response alternatives were: "Would be of no benefit," 2) 'Would be slightly beneficial," 3) 'Would be moderately beneficial," or 4) 'Would be highly beneficial." Secretaries were also asked to rank-order the three skills they would most benefit from if offered in a training session. (See Appendix for questionnaire)-

The form also asked for background information of the person completing the survey. The secretary's experience, tenure, specific type of job training, education, time Tapse since the last training session, age, and job type were sought. Finally, secretaries were asked when they would be most willing to attend training sessions.

The subjects were 36 university and private industry secretaries.

Twenty-eight of the secretaries were employed by Southwest Texas State University and the remaining subjects were employed by private industry in and around the San Marcos area. The subjects were visited at their job by a researcher who administered the survey on an individual basis. Instructions for completing the form were on the survey and subjects were invited to look over the form and ask any questions they might have. Depending on the subject's preference, the researcher waited for the questionnaire to be completed or returned the next day to pick up the form.

Results

The surveys were coded and entered into a computer program for statistical testing. A frequency distribution was provided so as to better understand the demographics and top perceived training needs. Secondly, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient was computed to determine any relationships between training needs and demographic variables.

Demographics

Table 1 displays the results of the subjects demographic characteristics.

The majority of respondents indicated that they had been employed in a secretarial position for more than two years (69.5%), with 38% having more than eleven years experience. Slightly over 65% reported having been at their same job for over two years. Almost 70% said their primary source of job training had been on-the-job. All were high school graduates with most (61%) having some college background. Half (50%) of those surveyed had not attended a training session in over two years. The ages were varied, with the highest number (30.6%) being 25-31. More than 55% of the secretaries classified their job as predominately "typing/filling/record keeping."

Perceived Training Needs

The frequency results for perceived training needs are shown in Table 2. Fifty percent believed they would receive no benefit from typing training.

Over 36% felt that training in grammar would be of no benefit while another 36% felt it would be of a slight benefit. Over 40% responded that shorthand/dictation would be of no benefit to them. Filing procedures/record Keeping training was viewed by 33.3% as being moderately helpful. Less than 20% believed that training in business correspondence would not be helpful. Over 36% believed that interpersonal communication would be highly beneficial training, with another 25% feeling it would be moderately helpful. Training on the word processor was viewed by 63.4% as being highly needed.

Table 3 presents the results of the training needs ranked first by the subjects. Twenty-five percent ranked training on the word processor as their most important training need. Another 16.7% reported that interpersonal communication training would be the most advantageous. Grammar was ranked by 13.9% as the most beneficial training that they could undergo.

Table 4 displays the combined results for the subjects three top ranked needs. Training on the word processor most often occurred as one of the top three needs (21.2%). Training in both interpersonal communication and grammar emerged as top ranked needs, with 13% responses for each. Business correspondence was seen by 12% as being one of the three most important training needs.

Other frequency results, as shown in Table 5, indicated that subjects were unwilling to attend training sessions after work (63.9%), on Saturdays (69.4%), or on a weekend trip (72.3%). Subjects were most willing to attend training during the work day (88.9%).

Perceived Training Needs and Demographics

Table 6 displays the results of the demographic variables correlated with perceived training needs. Since the primary purpose of this analysis procedure was to discover relationships and not to predict them, a two-tailed test was used with the probability level set at .05. The demographic variables correlated with each of the training needs included experience, tenure, educations, time lapsed since last training session, and age. Training backgrounds and job types were eliminated due to problems with coding.

The results that were significant indicated that the more education sécretaries had, the less they desired training in grammar (r=-.448, p<.01), in filing procedures/record keeping (r=-.378, p<.05), business correspondence (r=-.351, p<.05), interpersonal communication (r=-.402, p<.05), in-house communication (r=-.545, p<.01), receiving and screening visitors (r=-.454, p<.01), copying equipment (r=-.340, p<.05), and telephone communication (r=-.609, p<.01).

Experience was negatively correlated with perceived training needed on the dictaphone (r=-.528, p<.01). Length of tenure was negatively correlated

Table 1
Frequency Chart
Demographic Variables

ategory	Frequency	Percentage
		٠
Experience		i i
less than 6 months	0	.0
6 months to 2 years	. 4.	Ĭ1. 1
2 years to 5 years	11	30.6
6 years to 10 years	7	19.4
11 or more years	14	38.9
Totals	7 36	100.%
Tenure	•	
· less than 6 months	2	
6 months to 2 years	. , 10	5.6
2 years to 5 years	10 15	27.7
6 years to 10 years	.1.3	41.7
11 or more years	, 4	11.1
Totals	$\frac{5}{36}$	$\frac{13.9}{100.\%}$
\	30	100.%
Job Training	,	
Business/vocational school	7	19.4
Formal in-house training	, 3 · .	8.3
On the job training	24	66.7
Other •	1	2.8
Did not respond	1	2.8
Totals	$\frac{1}{36}$	$\frac{2.3}{100.\%}$
Education		•
less than high school graduate	0	.0
high school graduate	14	- 38.9
l year of college	8	. 22.2
`2 years of college	2	. 5.6
3-4 years of college	5	. 13.9
college graduate	7	19.4
Totals	36	100.%

Table $\tilde{1}'$ - Continued

•		
cegory	Frequency	Percentage
Time since last training		
less than 6 months	7	19.4
6 months to 2 years	7	19.4
more than 2 years	18	50.0
never	4	11.2
Totals	• 36	100.%
Age	•	,
· 18-24	7	19.4
25-31	11	30.6
32–38	5	13.9
39-44	7, .	19.4
45-50	2	5.6
51 or more	4	11.1
Totals	36	~ 100.%
		•
Job Description		¥ 1
Typing/filing/record keeping	20	" 55 <i>.</i> 6
Assistant to supervisor	13	36.0
Supervisor	2	5.6
Research/Investigation	<u>'1</u>	2.8
Totals °	$\sqrt{36}$	100.%
· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		



Table 2
Frequency Chart:
Perceived Training Needs

ed - Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Typing		
no benefit	18	50.0
\ slight benefit	8	22.2
moderate benefit	5	13.9
high benefit	<u>5</u> 36	13.9
Totals	36	100.%
Grammar	•	દ ,
no benefit .	6 .	` 16.7
slight benéfit	13	36.1
. moderate benefit	4 .	11.1
high benefit	13 36	36.1
Totals	36	100.%
Shorthand/Dictation	, •	•
no benefit	15	41.7
slight benefit	5	. 13.9
moderate benefit	8	22.2
high benefit	$\frac{8}{36}$	22.2
Totals	.36	100.%
Filing Procedures/ Record Keeping		
no benefit	10	27.8
slight benefit	11	30.6
moderate benefit	12	33.3
high benefit		8.3
Totals	$\frac{3}{36}$	100.%
Business Correspondence		-
no benefit	7	19.4
slight benefit	10	27.8
moderate benefit	9 .	25.0
high benefit	10 36	27.8
Totals	36	100.%

Table 2 - Continued

ed > Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Interpersonal Communication	•	
no benefit .	7	19.4
slight benefit	. 7	19.4
moderate benefit	` 9	25.0
high benefit	· 13	36.2
Totals	,36	100.%
In-house Communication		,
no benefit	• 9	25.0
slight benefit	. 13	36.1
moderate benefit	3	13.9
	. 9	25-0-
high benefit Totals	36	100.%
Telephone Communication	•	•
no benefit	. 11	30.6
slight benefit	. 13	36.1
moderate benefit	8	22.2
high benefit	_4	11.1
Totals	36.	100 %
Receiving and Screening Vist	itors	
-	. 9	25.0
no benefit	16	44.5
slight benefit	8 "	22.2
moderate benefit	3	8.3
high benefit	36	
		100.%
· Totals		100.%
Word Processor	•	
Word Processor	. 5	. 13.9
Word Processor no benefit	•	
Word Processor no benefit slight benefit	•	. 13.9
Word Processor no benefit slight benefit moderate benefit	5 1 7	13.9 2.8 19.4 63.9
Word Processor no benefit slight benefit moderate benefit high benefit	5 1 7	13.9 2.8 19.4
Word Processor no benefit slight benefit moderate benefit	5 1	13.9 2.8 19.4 63.9
Word Processor no benefit slight benefit moderate benefit high benefit Totals	5 1 7 23 36	13.9 2.8 19.4 63.9 100.%
Word Processor no benefit slight benefit moderate benefit high benefit Totals Copying Equipment	5 1 7 23 36	13.9 2.8 19.4 63.9 100.%
Word Processor no benefit slight benefit moderate benefit high benefit Totals Copying Equipment no benefit	5 1 7 23 36	13.9 2.8 19.4 63.9 100.%
Word Processor no benefit slight benefit moderate benefit high benefit Totals Copying Equipment no benefit slight benefit	5 1 7 23 36	13.9 2.8 19.4 63.9 100.%
Word Processor no benefit slight benefit moderate benefit high benefit Totals Copying Equipment no benefit	5 1 7 23 36	13.9 2.8 19.4 63.9 100.%

.Table 2 - Continued

•	_	•	
Need - Rating		Frequency	Percentage
			,
Dictaphone .			•
no benefit slight benefit moderate benefit high benefit Totals	•	20 5 5 6 36	55.6 13.9 13.9 16.7 100.%
Telephone		k	
no benefit slight benefit moderate benefit high benefit Totals	,•	21 8 5 2 36	$ \begin{array}{r} 58.3 \\ 22.2 \\ 13.9 \\ \hline 5.6 \\ \hline 100.\% \end{array} $
Other .		,	•
Responded Did not respond Totals		$\frac{3}{36}$	8.4 91.7 100.%
•	.	•	•

Table 3

Frequency Chart:

Subjects' First Ranked Needs

Need	Frequency	Percentage
Typing	3	8.3
Grammar •	5	13.9•
Shorthand/Dictation	3	8.3
Filing Procedures/Record Keeping	. 0 .	.0
Business Correspondence	. 3	8.3
Interpersonal Communication	6	16.7
In-house Communication	O	.0
Telephone Communication	0 .	.0
Receiving and Screening Visitors	2	5.6
Word Processor	. 9	25.0
Copying Equipment	0	.0
Dictaphone \	1	2.8
Telephone	0	. 0
Other	4	11.1
Totals	36	100.%

Table 4

Frequency Chart:

Overall Rankings of Top Three Needs

Need	Frequency	Percentage
		-
Typing	5	5.0
Grammar ,	13	. 13.0
Shorthand/Dictation	10	10.0
Filing Procedures/Record Keeping	5	5.0
Business Correspondence	12	. 12.0
Interpersonal Communication	13 5	13.0
In-house Communication	3 .	3.0
Telephone Communication	. 0 .	0
Receiving and Screening Visions	4	4.0
Word Processor	21	21.0
Copying Equipment	3	3.0
Dictaphone	, . 3	3.0
Telephone	2	2.0
Other	6	6.0
Totals	100	100.%

Table 5

Frequency Chart:

Times Willing to Attend Training Sessions

	3				
Time - Alternative			Frequency,	Per	centag e
		•			
After Work					
-		•	·, ,	•	22.2
yes	1	•	8 23 5 36		63.9
no undecided		*	<u>*</u> 5	•	13.9
Totals			36 .	•	100.%
				-	i
On Saturdays		,	•		
			•		0.5 0
yes			· 9		25.0 69.4
no	ζ,	70	. 23		5.6
undecided Totals	Ø 2	*`	9 25 2 436	,	100.%
			·		
); ;	,		
Weekend Trip	·	, ,			
•		; `	_		10 /
yes		• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •	7 26		19.4 72.3
no'		, ' '	3	٠	8.3
undecided Totals		j	3 36	•	100.7
^		,	·		
During Work Day	*			<u>'</u>	•
		•	* 32	٠	88.
y e s		• 4	1		2.
no undecided		, ,	32 1 3 36		$\frac{8}{100}$.
Totals			36		100.



Table 6 Correlation Matrix:

Demographic Variables by Training Needs*

Demographic Variables

	-	•		m 1	
	Experience	Tenure	Education	Time since last train.) Age
Typing	323	307	282	286	245
Grammar	.031	114	448(b)	203	073
Shorthand/ Dictation	255	128	.150	056	327
Filing/ Records	.059	054	378(a)	260	.008
Business Corres.	.001	- >166 , .`	351(a)	375(a)	077
Interper.	.160	√. 023	402(a)	206	.009 (
In-house Com.	034	151	545(b)	195	092 ;
Telephone Com.	008	·158	609(b)	234 ^x	.023
Receiving/ Screening	.107	.000	454(b)	276	027
Word Processor ··	133	195 · ,	274	066	039
Copying Equipment	167	331(a)	340(a)	072	038
Dictaphone	528(b)	309	-:128	242	259
Tel ephone	192	254	245	088	205

16=



^{*}n=36.

⁽a) p<.05, r=.330(b) p<.01, r=.420

with needed training for copying equipment (r=-.331, p<.05). Finally, the last significant relationship found was a negative correlation between the time elapsed since the last training session and business correspondence training desired (r=-.375, p<.05).

Discussion

It was not surprising that only a few secretaries believed that training in typing would be a significant benefit. A similar pattern was foundator shorthand/dictation. The most probable reason for these findings is that these skills are likely to be considered an important factor in hiring some one as a secretary. If one cannot perform these tasks, they are probably not hired as a secretary.

Training on the word processor was viewed by most as a highly important training need. This finding is consistent with the highest number one ranked need, as well as the highest of the top three combined rankings. It seems that secretaries viewed the word processor as a development that would make their tasks easier. Secretaries may have felt that the word processor, would allow them to spend less time typing and allow them more freedom to accomplish other chores. On the other hand, secretaries may have perceived this as the opportunity to advance in their careers. They may have hoped to become more important to their present organization, or to increase their employability with other potential employers. Finally, observing that none of the secretaries surveyed in this study had access to a word processor, they may have viewed it as important simply due to their curiosity.

Interpersonal communication, grammar, and business correspondence followed the word processor in rankings of the top three training needs. Interpersonal communication and grammar were both listed by many as their number one training need. Perhaps these skills are recognized by secretaries as an



important part of their jobs but ones in which they have never received formal training. This would seem to be especially true in situations where the secretary was hired for her typing skills but expected to perform the role of receptionist, purchasing agent, or office manager.

Finally, it was apparent that secretaries did not want to interrupt their personal time to attend training programs. Family obligations are probably the biggest reason for this response, although the subjects living in the college community may have meant they had commitments to school. Since the subjects were all from a small town, it would be of interest to see if urbanites would respond in the same pattern. Perhaps subjects from urban areas would prove to have fewer traditional family ties and tend to be more career oriented.

Using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, several relationships between demographic variables and perceived training needs took on a clearer meaning. Of the correlations that reached a level of significance, all of them were negatively correlated.

Overall, education was significantly correlated with more items than any other. The more education people had, the less they felt they needed training in grammar, filing procedures/record keeping, business correspondence, interpersonal communication, in-house communication, telephone communication, receiving and screening visitors, and working copying equipment. Several reasons may explain these occurrences. Secretaries with higher levels of education may hold higher level positions which do not require many of these more menial tasks such as filing and shorthand. Even though a more educated secretary might hold a higher level position, she might perceive many of the skills as more basic to many of the other abilities she has gained through her education.

As for the more creative communicative type skills such as business correspondence, interpersonal communication, and even to some degree in-house and telephone communication, the higher educated person probably has a greater verbal propensity than those with lesser degrees of education. This is not to imply that education necessarily creates superior communicative abilities, but that the person who excels, or at least has the potential to excel academically, will quite probably have greater verbal competence than will those who are unable to gain education.

Length of experience was found to be negatively correlated with perceived training needed on the dictaphone machine. A similar relationship was found between tenure and copying equipment. These skills are probably considered basic to secretarial work, and therefore, the more experienced secretary either has learned to use the equipment thoroughly or no longer needs to utilize them in order to accomplish her tasks. A possible explanation for copying equipment being associated with tenure but not experience might be that a person who has worked with an organization for a number of years is more familiar with that company's equipment than a newer employee regardless of experience.

Limitations of Present Study and Conclusions

Obviously, any conclusions resulting from this study should be approached with caution. Although this study makes some headway toward understanding secretarial training needs, several limitations are apparent.

A larger sample of secretaries needed to be interviewed, and any replication of the study should consider increasing the number of subjects.

Also, the population of subjects was somewhat restricted in that many of them came from an academic community. Several extraneous variables could have effected the overall findings, such as the type of tasks, educational backgrounds and even the age group that is drawn to this type of environment.



Another limitation was the survey instrument itself. It is difficult to tell whether it really discriminated on such items as job type or specific training background. Also the item on "time" since last training session" probably did not accomplish what it was intended to. It was hoped that this item would indicate innovative organizations or aggressive individuals seeking improvement. Perhaps a future survey could clearly distinguish between job levels, and also between various types of training backgrounds. Further, some method of better identifying innovative agencies and self-motivated people might be developed.

Although the present study presents findings with limited generalizability, these results are a starting point for future inquiry. It appears that businesses have a great deal to gain from investigating training needs. If organizations can more accurately assess their secretaries training needs, then money spent in training programs will yield a greater return upon investment. Secondly, if certain demographic variables are found to be correlated with certain desirable traits in secretaries, than organizations may implement a more systematic means of recruiting employees. Not only could this help cut cost by reducing turnover, but it could enable personnel managers to know what kind of skill deficiencies or over-qualifications to expect from an applicant. In this manner, the organization will be maximizing the goodness of fit between the secretary and her tasks.

Survey Questionnaire

This research project seeks to determine perceived training needs of secretaries across a broad spectrum of organizations. The analysis will be based on the collective responses of individuals. It will not be necessary to identify any individuals who fill out this survey, therefore, please to not identify yourself by name anywhere on this survey.

The results of this project will be treated as confidential. If the results were-to be published, or otherwise reported, the name of this organization and its type of service would be omitted.

In filling out this survey, please be frank and honest in order to ensure an accurate analysis of the situation.

THANK YOU

P	A	RT]

Please answer the following questions by placing a mark by the answer that most appropriately describes you.

1.	Length of experience as a secretary.	2.	Length of experience with this organization.
3.	less than 6 months 6 months to two years 2 years to 5 years 6 years to 10 years 11 or more years Specific job training. Business or trade school Formalized training in company On the job training Other	3.	less than 6 months 6 months to 2 years 2 years to 5 years 6 years to 10 years 11 or more years Educational background. Less than high school graduate High school graduate 1 year of college 2 years of college 3-4 years of college College graduate
5.	How long has it been since you attended a training session directly related to your job. Less than 6 months 6 months to 2 years More than 2 years Never		age. 7. Which best descibes your job duties? 18-24 25-31



If a training pragram was offered, how would each of the following areas benefit you?

Please respond by placing a mark in the box that most accurately describes your feelings.

•			,	
Job Related Areas or Skills	Would be of no benefit	Would be slightly beneficial	Would be moderately beneficial	Would be highly beneficial
Typing		•.	•	
Grammar .	r +1)	•	,	1
Shorthand/ Dictation	- /•	,		/
Filing Procedures/ Record Keeping	. •			•
Business Correspondence (authoring letters)	•	, ,		
Interpersonal Communica- tion Skills		•		
In-house Communication				
Telephone Communication	,	·		
Receiving and Screening Visitors		,		
Equipment Skills Use of:				
Word Processor				
Copying Equipment				
Dictaphone		. (٥
Telephone				
Other				

of, please rank-order the thr	ee you feel you would most	Jener 10	1 I Om	•	
1.	2.	3		· yr	
Would you consider attending	training sessions:	YES	NO	UNDECIDED	
	After work during the week		•	• - '	,

Including the topics listed in Part II, and any other job related areas you can think

After work during the week

On Saturdays

On a Weekend Trip



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