

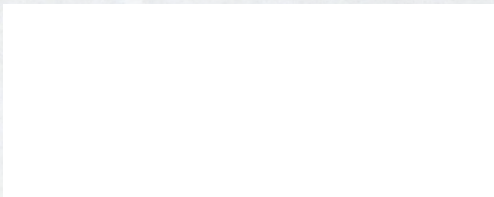
**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INDUCTION PROGRAMME FOR
DEPARTMENTAL SECRETARIES AT TECHNIKON A.**

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Dissertation submitted in partial compliance with the requirements for the Master's Degree in Technology: Education (Management), Durban Institute of Technology.

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10/3/2003
.....
DATE

DEDICATION

To my parents - Nonhlanhla and Gibson -

I know you are proud of me.

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I would like to thank my supervisor and lecturer, Mrs J. Prosser for her guidance, support and patience and also the following people.

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ABSTRACT

Induction is the process of introducing new employees to the goals of the organisation, its policies and procedures, to co-workers as well as to the activities or the tasks to be performed in the job.

Secretaries who are employed by Technikon A often encounter problems in their jobs. These secretaries are new candidates from colleges or technikons, some are from other organisations outside Technikon A and others have been promoted or transferred within the Technikon.

New secretaries are often faced by challenges, for instance, they are not certain how to answer the telephone according to Technikon A's requirements and how to dress for the office.

The purpose of this study was to investigate problems faced by new secretaries in their jobs. Secretaries and heads of department, who are employed by Technikon A, were interviewed. Strategies to solve the new secretaries' problems were discussed and recommendations to solve the new incumbents' problems were outlined.

Lastly, a proper induction programme for new secretaries was drawn up.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Technikon A has a Human Resources Department, which is responsible for the orientation of new staff, both academic and administrative. This is organised by the Department of Staff Development. Induction, specifically for new secretaries, does not exist and yet they are expected, from the first day, to perform their duties well. The assumption is that since appointees have the required qualifications, they are sufficiently competent to do so.

When new secretaries join the institution, they are given desks and all the equipment they need, and, thereafter, they are left on their own provided they do their job. No-one really assists them or over-sees their development. If they encounter problems they have to, themselves, find help. Heads of department at Technikon A frequently complain that the performance of secretaries, who are not trained at Technikon A, is not good. Among their inadequacies is that they do not answer the telephone correctly, their communication is poor and they also lack reception skills.

1.2 REASONS FOR THIS RESEARCH

The researcher worked for four years as a departmental secretary at a tertiary institution and is, currently, involved in the training of secretaries. Both her own experience and observation has sparked an interest in the problems encountered by new secretaries and the need for a good programme of induction, specifically designed for them. Although all new employees undergo an orientation programme introducing them to Technikon A and its facilities, an induction programme for secretaries does not exist. This study will concentrate on the first year of secretaries' employment, before they are subjected to the performance appraisal procedure which takes place the year after they join Technikon A.

1.3 AIM OF THIS RESEARCH

The aim of this research is to recommend an induction programme which includes mentoring for secretaries who are new at Technikon A. Mentors help new recruits to adjust to a new environment and to reassure them as they go through the psychological process of matching their expectations with the reality of the situation.

1.4 ANALYSIS OF TERMS

1.4.1 INDUCTION

Most writers agree that induction should be the first, or as close to the first, event when newcomers enter organisations (Wanous and Reichers, 2000). Gerber, *et al* (1995) maintain that the first few days in a new job are of vital importance for both the employee and the employer. Zemke (1989) describes "induction" as a process, not a programme, that is a list of items that should be accomplished in a specific period.

Induction is the process of introducing new employees to the goals of the organisation, its policies and procedures, to co-workers as well as to the activities or the tasks to be performed and the equipment to be used (Carrell, *et al* 1998). Hilgert and Leonard (1998) say it is a process designed to help new employees become acquainted with the organisation and understand the expectations the organisation has of them. Induction is when new employees are introduced to an institution's mission and made to feel part of the team. It is key to sparking early productivity and improving employee retention (Kleinman, 2000). Parry (1993:1) explains that the reason for induction is to provide an early opportunity to establish a positive relationship between employee and employer.

Secretaries should be inducted into their jobs as it helps them to develop both a sense of belonging to the organisation and become productive as soon as possible.

Induction is best viewed holistically. It is activated during the pre-engagement process - it starts before a secretary is employed. She/he has to be given information about the organisation, that is, its vision, mission statement, successes and failures and other valuable information. Induction is not complete until the employer and the new secretary are satisfied with the employment relationship (Corbridge and Pilbeam, 1998: 120). This view of induction separates it from the common conception that it consists of a "first day induction course" with a programme of "information overload". Instead the holistic approach recognises that the transition from candidate to employee may commence several months prior to starting work and continue for twelve or even twenty-four months into employment (Corbridge and Pilbeam, 1998).

Induction should be treated as a process and not merely as a course during which a new secretary should be told "certain things". The long term objective of any induction programme is to fully integrate the new person into the organisation, its culture and ways and means, so that she/he understands the context in which her/his work is carried out and so can increase her/his contribution to the organisation's success (Honey, 1994:110).

The content of the induction process will depend on the specific needs of the department and the skills of the new employee. Employees who are experienced in their jobs, that is those who are joining Technikon A from other organisations or those who have been promoted and transferred within Technikon A, are likely to need less of the induction process because they already have knowledge of what is expected from them. Induction does not apply only to new secretaries, but should also include those who have been transferred or promoted from other departments. These secretaries will be starting new jobs, with new people around them in, possibly, unfamiliar surroundings. They can feel just as lost as any beginner, yet they are often left to fend for themselves as it is assumed they know the organisation (Marks, 1970). Nevertheless, both experienced and inexperienced secretaries should receive thorough induction (Byars and Rue, 1991)

The transition from training to be a secretary and actually doing the job is a major step. A positive induction experience is an important introduction to the occupation of secretary. Inducting new secretaries into the job and aiming to meet the head of department's expectations entails more than telling them about Technikon A's policies and procedures, more than a walk around the campus to point out important locations, such as the media centre and the library. It involves sitting down with secretaries and going through each task that has to be done and engaging them in conversation about the work in their offices. And while the orientation phase of the process may conclude after three months, induction should

continue in order to develop the secretaries' skills, for example, typing, telephone call screening and answering, reception, and handling of visitors. (Hope, 1999).

Starting a new job is considered by psychologists, for most people, to be one of the most stressful of experiences. The more management can help secretaries to settle in and reduce their anxieties, the better they will be able to concentrate on their jobs and learn about the organisation (Skeats, 1991). The absence of a proper induction process may cause "induction crisis" during the transition from training to employment. "Induction crisis" occurs when an employee questions, reasserts or rejects the initial decision to accept the employment. Rejection by an employee may be triggered by a relatively small incident, but results from an accumulation of concerns which have been ignored by the employer. A properly inducted employee will be able to understand the new job challenges and cope with the whole situation (Corbridge and Pilbeam, 1998:120).

The first few weeks on the job are especially formative. This is the time when newcomers establish attitudes about the position, about co-workers, management, and the institution itself. In the long term, this decisive stage can even influence overall job satisfaction and determine whether a staff member decides to stay in the organisation (Messmer, 2000:2).

According to Wanous and Reichers (2000) research indicates that new employees require more than just information about terms of employment and related factors in order to adjust to their employment. They also require help in establishing relationships with new co-workers and in managing the anxiety and stress that accompanies the experience of joining a new institution.

An induction programme should provide for feedback to make sure that new secretaries fully understand what has been communicated to them. Feedback should be formalized by scheduling a performance review no later than three months after the start of employment or following transfer to another department. Emphasis should be placed on getting to know the employee's problems and concerns (Koehler, 1992).

Timing is a critical factor in the success or failure of an induction programme. Not only does the overall duration need to be considered, but also the pace of delivery. Each secretary learns at a different pace, so the induction will also differ, depending on the pace of the individual's ability to comprehend and learn information. For this reason, it is important to build in regular checks on progress in case the pace is too fast or too slow (Parry, 1993:19).

1.4.2 ORIENTATION

Most authors use the words "orientation" and "induction" interchangeably. Orientation is a brief process. It is showing a new person around the place in which she/he will be working. In the orientation process the supervisor may choose to escort the new employee around the department, showing her/him the equipment and facilities and introducing her/him to other employees. Orientation can take one or two days and it should give enough information to a new secretary so that she/he is able to "survive" at least the first year of employment. The orientation phase may conclude after the first week or two, but induction should continue in order to further develop a secretary's skills (Hope, 1999).

The first few days and weeks can be crucial for integrating a new person into the organisation so it is important to ensure that the orientation and induction processes function well.

1.4.3 MENTOR

The word "mentor" originates from Homer's *Odyssey*, the tale of the king of Ithaca who went to fight in the Trojan War. When he left, he entrusted the care of his son, Telemachus, to a mentor, who served as a teacher and overseer. The arrangement is that a mentor should be a person who is older and wiser and so should take

charge of a younger, less experienced protege (Hay, 1995:31). According to Shea (1992:13) mentors are helpers. He defines a mentor as "having a significant beneficial effect on the life or style of another person", generally as a result of personal contact. In the induction process, it is important and helpful to provide each new secretary with a designated colleague who can act as a "minder", "confidant" and "guide", who can help the new secretary to adjust to the new environment and reassure her/him as she/he goes through the psychological process of adjusting her/his expectations to match the reality of the situation (Honey, 1994).

It is increasingly common practice to assign a mentor to a new secretary. The mentor is sometimes known as a "sponsor" or "starter's friend" and acts as both friend and adviser. The role of a mentor is essentially supportive and care must be exercised in selecting a person who will relate well to the newcomer. Supervisors or others with managerial responsibility, are not suitable as the intention is to provide informal support to augment the formal system (Parry, 1993:26).

Research indicates that mentors are most successful when they are older than the beginning secretary and when they are of the same gender (Rebore, 1998: 144).

Mentoring is a process whereby a mentor and a new secretary work together to discover and develop the latter's latent abilities, to provide her/him with knowledge and skills as opportunities and needs arise, and for the mentor to serve as an

effective tutor, counsellor, friend and foil enabling the new secretary to sharpen her/his skills.

The idea of mentoring has worked very well in schools, especially in Wales, where newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are assigned to experienced teachers to guide them in classrooms in what is termed "articled teacher and licenced teacher route". Experienced teachers often complain about their own early experiences as being "thrown in at the deep end" and left to sink or swim (Turner, 1994).

For this reason, mentoring was introduced for NQTs and also students in initial teacher training courses. Turner also points out that there has been an awareness for many years of the need for greater attention to be paid to the induction of new teachers and for meeting their needs during their initial placement in maintained schools (1994). Employers of secretaries, such as Technikon A, may well be advised to study mentoring in schools and use this as an example to establish a regular procedure for their own staff.

Messmer (2000) says that assigning a mentor can help reduce "learning curve" time and also ease some of the stress suffered by the new secretaries in their first few months of employment.

1.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is important for every organisation to induct new incumbents into their jobs so that they can quickly learn and develop the skills required by their positions. Induction will also help them to acquire confidence and perform according to their supervisors' expectations.

1.6 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 introduced the topic, outlined the reasons for doing this research, explained the terms "induction", "orientation" and "mentor". Chapter 2 will examine general problems secretaries encounter when they start working at technikons.

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CHAPTER TWO

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter will examine the general problems that new secretaries encounter when they join technikons. These problems are often encountered by new secretaries when joining technikons, either from other organisations or training colleges.

2.2 GENERAL PROBLEMS NEW SECRETARIES ENCOUNTER AT TECHNIKONS

The problems of social adjustment that new secretaries have to face, are, sometimes, not handled sympathetically. All human beings, at some time in their lives, experience loneliness and a sense of disorientation, especially when finding themselves in a new and unfamiliar environment. Most new incumbents experience this problem when they join technikons as employees. They complain that they are not even oriented when they start working, as a result they are forced to learn and know by trial and error. So, a new job will need adjustment in the life of new secretaries (Tyson and York, 1996: 121).

New secretaries, from time to time, have to handle students, staff members and visitors from inside and outside the technikons. Sometimes, what becomes a

problem to most new secretaries is how to tell a caller that the head of department is not available to see the visitor. Some callers are impatient and may force their way to the head of department's office: new recruits have to use tact in handling them. It becomes even more difficult when a staff member wants to see the head of department. Most new secretaries complained that staff members do not listen to them, because they are new, when they say the head of department is engaged. Staff members maintain they have been at the technikon for a long time, so a newcomer cannot tell them what to do. For an inexperienced secretary this becomes very difficult to handle.

Another problem which inexperienced secretaries face is that they have no knowledge of the culture of the institution. Marks (1970: 5) describes the organisation culture as "the way we do things around here". It refers to the set of key values, beliefs and understanding shared by members of an organisation. Cherrington (1995: 48) explains that culture enhances the stability of the organisation and helps members interpret its activities and events. The focus of organisational culture is to provide new members with a sense of identity and to generate from them a commitment to the beliefs and values of the organisation.

New secretaries frequently find difficulty in identifying with the new way of doing things. They complain that it takes a long time for them to adapt to a new technikon situation and acquaint themselves with the procedures. Hutchins (2000: 34) points

out that employees, who join companies can be compared to immigrants: "they need to learn the history, rules, people, language and culture, as well as performance expectations of the new job". Most secretaries experience common problems of, for example, not knowing how to type letters according to the specifications of their heads of department.

New secretaries joining technikons do not know the campus and, since they have not been inducted, experience problems trying to find where different departments are situated. Their heads of department often ask them to hand-deliver documents. It usually takes them a long time to do so because they have to ask for directions. This wastes a lot of their working time. Gerber, *et al* (1995) point out that it is important for new employees to be assimilated into the workforce as soon as possible. Early assimilation makes it easier for them to be successful in the long run and it also helps boost their morale.

Travel and function arrangements are part of a secretary's job (Steenekamp and Bekker, 1987). New secretaries at technikons have to do this for staff members and also sometimes arrange functions for their departments. If a secretary is new she/he has to be told how this is done. One new incumbent said that a staff member gave her details of a conference that she wanted to attend and asked her to make bookings. This was very frustrating as she did not know where to start and she eventually had to approach a senior secretary for help.

Fowler (1996) says that organisations and groups develop norms of acceptable and expected behaviour from their members. New secretaries at technikons are not told what these norms are and they find it difficult to accept something they are not certain about.

Communication was also cited by some new secretaries as a problem. The fact that they have to use English to communicate, either verbally or in writing, is a problem to them. One secretary pointed out that she was asked by her supervisor to draft a response to correspondence. When she tried to get help, her supervisor told her that she has good qualifications so it should not present a problem for her. Nevertheless new secretaries are easily embarrassed if they have to fumble their way through their first weeks of employment, trying to learn correct communication channels.

Most new technikon secretaries are African and English is their second language. Some new recruits said that when they were new they felt embarrassed when they had to answer the telephone when someone was present. They talked softly so they could not be overheard as they were uncomfortable when conversing in English. Jennings (1981: 4) agrees that it is difficult for new employees to communicate with people if they lack confidence in the language being used.

2.3 CONCLUSION

Starting a new job is not easy especially for inexperienced secretaries. They may encounter a lot of problems which they will have to solve while trying to perform their jobs efficiently. Personnel, with whom they work, will expect them to know everything about their jobs, despite the fact that no-one had shown them how things are done in the new institution.

2.4 SUMMARY

Chapter 2 discussed the general problems encountered by new secretaries when they join a technikon. These problems are not knowing how to handle students, staff members and visitors, how the technikon operates "the culture of doing things" and communicating with people in English. New secretaries find difficulty when they have to deliver documents because they are not familiar with the campus and from time to time they are asked to arrange functions and travel for staff or heads of department.

Chapter 3 will describe and analyse the interview schedule and problems encountered by new secretaries at Technikon A will be examined.

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CHAPTER THREE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter will describe and analyse the structured interview schedule which the researcher used to conduct interviews. The problems specific to new secretaries at Technikon A were examined. These problems were divided into those encountered by new secretaries who had never worked before (inexperienced) and those, who were experienced, but were joining Technikon A from other organisations or departments in Technikon A.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interviews were conducted by the researcher using a structured interview schedule. The researcher chose to use the interview schedule because she had access to the subjects as she worked in the same institution where they were employed. The subjects were ten secretaries and three heads of department. The interview schedule was divided into two parts, one covered questions to new secretaries and the second, questions to heads of department. A copy of the interview schedule is attached as Appendix A.

3.3 THE INTERVIEWS

From the interviews conducted by the researcher the responses were as follows:

Question:

3.3.1 How long have you been employed by Technikon A?

Three secretaries had been with Technikon A for almost two years, five had been employed for not more than one year and two had been employed for nearly ten months.

Question:

3.3.2 A: Did you join Technikon A straight from training college?

B: Were you transferred from another department?

C: Were you promoted to your present position?

D: Did you join Technikon A from another organisation?

Four secretaries had joined Technikon A straight from training colleges; two were transferred from other departments, one was promoted to her present position and three joined Technikon A from another organisations.

Question:

3.3.3 Were you inducted into your job when you joined Technikon A?

Two secretaries were inducted into their jobs when they joined Technikon A and eight were not inducted.

Question:

3.3.4 If your answer is Yes, into which of the following were you inducted?

- ☐ How to answer the telephone?
- ☐ Operating the computer - how to log in and out?
- ☐ Typing documents according to Technikon A's requirements?
- ☐ Arranging conferences or seminars?
- ☐ Handling difficult visitors or callers?

Two secretaries were inducted into the following:-

Telephone answering, operating the computer (logging in and out) typing documents according to Technikon A's requirements, arranging conferences and seminars and handling visitors. Other areas they were inducted into were: handling diploma applications, checking records and using the entrance points system for registering students.

Question:

3.3.5 After the induction programme, were you able to:-

- A: Answer the telephone correctly?
- B: Operate the computer on your own?

- C: Type documents according to requirements?
- D: Arrange conferences or seminars?
- E: Handle difficult callers, either calling in person or telephonically?

After the induction programme, they were able to perform the above duties.

Question:

3.3.6 Is there anything else you learnt from the induction?

One secretary reported that she had learnt about the different departments on campus, how each related to the other and the difference between academic and administration departments.

QUESTIONS TO HEADS OF DEPARTMENT

Question:

3.3.7 Does your department have an induction programme for new secretaries?

Two heads of department interviewed answered that their departments did not have induction programmes for new secretaries. Only one said his department did a short one day orientation for a new secretary in his department.

Question:

3.3.8 Does your department have a senior secretary who serves as a "mentor" to the new secretary?

All three heads of department did not have mentors in their departments.

Question:

3.3.9 Does your department work with the Human Resources Department to induct new secretaries?

Since there was no induction arranged for new secretaries, heads of department did not work with the Human Resources Department on orientation/induction courses.

Question:

3.3.10 Does your department work on its own to induct new secretaries?

One head of department agreed that his department worked on its own to orient a new secretary. Although it was a short orientation course, it did help a new secretary in performing some duties.

Heads of department complained that Technikon A did not have an induction programme for secretaries that they could use in their departments.

Questions 8, 9 and 10 were not asked because the answer was No to question 7.

3.4 ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The results showed that 80% of secretaries were not inducted into their positions when they joined Technikon A. Only 20% went through an induction programme, which was departmental, not institutional. Heads of department took the initiative in inducting secretaries but they confirmed that this was done informally.

The response from heads of department was that their departments did not have a proper induction programme for new secretaries. Only one head of department arranged orientation for his secretary but it was an informal process. None had mentors for the new recruits. They also did not work with the Human Resources Department to induct new staff members as there was no formal induction programme in Technikon A.

The researcher's observations were that secretaries were not inducted into their jobs when they join Technikon A. Heads of department did not liaise with the Human Resources Department nor shared ideas on the type of induction programme suitable for new secretaries.

3.5 SPECIFIC PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY NEW SECRETARIES AT TECHNIKON A

3.5.1 TELEPHONE ETIQUETTE

Telephone answering is part of a secretary's duties. It is important that she/he answers the telephone correctly. Spencer and Pruss (1995: 53) explain that when a secretary answers a telephone, she/he represents the organisation for which she/he works. New secretaries at Technikon A were afraid to answer the telephone because they were unsure of how to answer, for example, whether they

should identify the department, state the name of the institution or give their own names. Another reason was that they lacked confidence when speaking on the telephone, since they were not familiar with the institution. New secretaries had to use English to converse with people. They experienced problems because for most of them English was their second language: they felt embarrassed when they had to answer, using the language. Steenekamp and Bekker (1987) agree that secretaries should be taught how to use and answer the telephone as they often present the first impression of the organisation.

3.5.2 STRESS AND LACK OF EXPERIENCE

New recruits may suffer from stress when they begin a job and realise they lack job experience. Carrell, *et al* (1998: 204) say starting a new job is considered to be one of the most stressful of life experiences. At this stage of their development, new recruits are trying to prove themselves that they are the right people for the job so that they gain recognition from their colleagues, peers and supervisors (Cooper and Straw, 1993: 39). New secretaries at Technikon A suffered stress because of the fact that they were new and unfamiliar with the campus. Their work accumulated because they lacked the skills in prioritising their duties. They were also not able to manage time: knowing how long a task took. Work overload, the major time stressor, can lead to time pressure and overtime work (Arnold and Feldman, 1986).

Cascio (1995: 241) agrees that the first year with an organisation is a critical period during which a new incumbent will, or will not, learn to become a "high flyer". This was also a critical time when new secretaries developed perceptions about Technikon A, colleagues and especially the head of department. Marks (1970) agrees that new incumbents are likely to feel the stress he calls "culture shock". He defines this as a feeling of inadequacy that new recruits may suffer on entering a company of strangers, who all appear to know how to behave towards each other while only new incumbents do not know how to behave.

When interviewed most new secretaries cited the merger of Technikon A with two other technikons as another factor of stress. Some of these secretaries had been with Technikon A for less than a year and so were now uncertain of their future. This troubled them as they did not know if they would be affected by the merger.

The lack of work experience presented a problem: this occurred particularly when a secretary was given a report to type and was expected to present this to the head of department in an accurate form. She did not know what format to use, what software programme to use and whether to print it on a letterhead or on a blank sheet of paper.

Nelson and Quick (2000: 29) stress the fact that an efficient time manager is not necessarily the person who gets the most done. Instead it is a person who knows

which activities contribute most to his or her long-term life development. Time management enables a person to minimise work overload and to prioritise work and leisure time activities.

3.5.3 TRANSITION FROM COLLEGE TO JOB

Secretaries who joined Technikon A direct from colleges experienced problems because they lacked information on how to do the work. Secretaries interviewed complained that they did not have anyone to show them how to do their jobs. It was assumed that they knew how to perform most duties as they were employed because they had relevant qualifications. For example, if a secretary was given a letter to type by a head of department or other staff member, she/he was expected to know how to do it. Some secretaries maintained that it was difficult to perform duties when they lacked the "know how". Few had been exposed to an office environment during training.

3.5.4 DRESS CODE

Heads of department complained that secretaries sometimes wore jeans to work. Unfortunately, secretaries were not told about the correct way of dressing for the office. One senior secretary approached our Department to check if we taught a module on dress and deportment, two aspects concerning new secretaries. This

was a problem particularly for new recruits who had not been trained at Technikon A. According to Blueprint (2001) people judge others by the way they look as well as by the way they act. It is important that new secretaries know how they should dress for the office.

New secretaries also had problems with the use of make-up. Most of them agreed that they would like to use make-up but did not know how to and were afraid that they would not look attractive and professional.

3.5.5 COMMUNICATION

Communication is one of the most important aspects of the secretary's role. Secretaries spend most of their time either in direct contact with people or in producing and channelling information that will affect people (Ncube, 2001: 14). New secretaries wanted guidance on which methods of communication to use when sending out information. New secretaries at Technikon A had difficulty and were often uncertain when to use, for example, e-mail, memoranda or letters: they were unable to decide which was the most efficient and convenient form.

3.6 PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY EXPERIENCED SECRETARIES

New, but experienced, secretaries may have learnt how to do their work but every organisation is different. This applies particularly to academic organisations which are quite different from those in industry or commerce. These differences are often in organisational hierarchies, the terminology used and forms to be filled in, which, usually, can be a problem for a new secretary. New secretaries also encountered the problem of bureaucracy in academic institutions: everything was done according to rules from which there could be no deviation.

New secretaries had to deal with different personalities among staff and students and often patience was necessary. Some students were teenagers and immature and required direction. This occurred when students had to consult with lecturers and new secretaries had to tell them the procedure for consulting with lecturers. Some students resented this. Therefore, new secretaries had to maintain composure even when things went wrong. Poise under extreme pressure was essential and they had to always maintain a strictly professional attitude (Jennings, 1981: 14).

3.7 CONCLUSION

Technikon A does not have a formal induction programme for new secretaries. Only a few secretaries were inducted when they joined and it was at their departments' own initiative. This is one of the reasons why new incumbents experienced problems in their jobs. This Chapter discussed specific problems that new secretaries at Technikon A encountered when they joined the institution, especially during their first year of employment.

3.8 SUMMARY

It was evident from the interviews conducted by the researcher with Technikon A's secretaries that only 20% underwent induction when they joined. It is important to note that this induction was arranged through the initiative of their own departments. 80% secretaries at Technikon A did not undergo any induction.

In this Chapter the researcher examined problems encountered by Technikon A's new secretaries (both inexperienced and experienced). These problems were concerned with telephone etiquette, stress and lack of experience, transition from college to job, dress code, communication, differences in organisations and dealing with people. Chapter Four will give recommendations for a programme of induction by Technikon A.

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CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This research looked at the problems encountered by new secretaries at Technikon A. New secretaries were divided into two categories; those who were inexperienced and those who were experienced, but had joined Technikon A from other organisations or been promoted/transferred from within the institution. After a detailed analysis of these problems, the researcher concluded that Technikon A had to devise an induction programme for new secretaries. This would help them develop the skills necessary to deal with problems at work. They would also learn how Technikon A operated in dealing with staff, students and the general public. New secretaries would have mentors and shadowers to help them cope with the daily round of office tasks.

The researcher concluded that as far as Technikon A's secretaries were concerned, induction is important because it teaches a new recruit about the organisation and her/his job. It helps a new incumbent adapt quickly and know exactly what is expected from her/him.

In this Chapter the researcher will discuss recommendations for Technikon A and its departments when appointing new secretaries.

4.2 SITUATION IN TECHNIKON A REQUIRING INDUCTION

As outlined in Chapter 3 new secretaries at Technikon A experienced difficulties when they are first employed because each organisation is unique. Technikon A has its own way of doing things with which they might not be familiar.

All new secretaries, who joined Technikon A, lacked work experience. Those who had worked before might be regarded as new because they were joining an organisation with which they were not familiar. Induction is a process that new recruits undergo when they join an organisation.

The lack of work experience and lack of knowledge of Technikon A by experienced secretaries joining it, suggested that a process of induction would be necessary.

It is the task of an employing organisation (in this study, Technikon A) to be responsible for ensuring that all new secretaries are inducted into the institution.

Induction is a process through which a new employee learns how to function efficiently within a new organisational culture by obtaining the information, values and behavioural skills associated with his or her new role in an organisation (Carrell, *et al* 1998).

In Technikon A, the Human Resources Department is probably best situated to be responsible for the general induction of all three groups, that is, inexperienced cadets, experienced secretaries new to Technikon A and experienced personnel promoted or transferred within the institution. The programme should include addressing new secretaries about policies, examining the mission statement, procedures, leave privileges and the organisation chart. A campus tour is essential so that everyone knows where each section/department is situated. This will assist in expediting communication between departments.

4.3 THE PROGRAMME OF INDUCTION: RECOMMENDATIONS

4.3.1 RESPONSIBILITIES OF HEADS OF DEPARTMENT

Following general induction, specialised induction should be the task of heads of departments. They should be required to draw up an induction programme for their own departmental secretaries. The reason is that each department is unique, having its own needs: for example, a secretary in the Department of Chemistry is faced by different challenges and performs different tasks in contrast to a secretary in the Office Technology Department. There may be common requirements dealt with in the general induction programme, but each department will have its own special needs.

Departments should be held responsible for ensuring that their new secretaries are properly inducted into their jobs. Unfortunately, the evidence derived from interviews with secretaries suggests that insufficient is being done to help them fit into their jobs. It is a sad fact that only 20% of all new secretaries were inducted at Technikon A and this was solely through the initiative of their departments. This unsatisfactory situation must be remedied by a proper induction programme for all secretaries in the initial stage of their employment who are employed at Technikon A. It should be remembered that induction is important because it helps a new recruit feel part of an organisation and rapidly makes her/him productive. Induction is helpful because it reduces fear and insecurity about the requirements of the job.

It is advisable for a head of department to appoint a mentor for a new secretary. The role of a mentor is to provide support to new recruits and she/he acts as a "minder" and guide. The person appointed should be one who has a thorough knowledge of the job, is patient, a good teacher and a team player; one who should be able to do the work and at the same time have a running dialogue with a new incumbent to explain what is being done. The mentor should never get so busy that she/he forgets to take care of the new recruit (Shea, 1992).

A shadower may be substituted for a mentor. *The Cambridge International Dictionary of English* defines a "shadower" as someone who follows one around, in this case, the secretary, as she/he performs her/his tasks. The shadower always

works closely with the secretary, checking whether tasks have been performed correctly. It is important that feedback is timeously given. A shadower should be kind and sensitive to a new secretary's needs. Professional courtesy is essential and, if necessary, individual counselling may have to be given.

Usually, mentors and shadowers are senior secretaries in superior positions: for example, a secretary to a dean may mentor or shadow a head of department's secretary or a departmental secretary. Mentors and shadowers should have been with Technikon A for a reasonable period (at least five years) before they can shadow a new secretary until she is familiar with both the job and the surroundings. Assigning a mentor and a shadower will help reduce the length of the "learning curve" and take some of the stress out of a new secretary's first few weeks at Technikon A.

4.3.2 TIME ALLOCATION

It is virtually impossible for a new employee to absorb in one long session all the information in the induction programme. Unfortunately, many departmental task induction programmes produce bad results because new incumbents are simply given manuals and told to read the material and ask any questions they might have. Another method (which has failed) is to give them menial tasks to perform (Cadwell, 1988).

The researcher recommends that brief sessions, not exceeding two hours, spread over several days, can be utilised for induction. This will increase the likelihood that a new secretary will understand and retain the information presented. The period taken, for example, over three or four weeks, will depend on how quickly she/he learns and also on the complexity of the job to be handled. Heads of department should give new incumbents enough time to learn tasks and also engage the help of mentors or shadowers.

4.3.3 CULTURE OF TECHNIKON A

As has been explained, an induction programme is a form of employee training to introduce new recruits to their jobs, the people with whom they will be working and the larger organisation in which they will work; it is a process of adaptation, that is of "learning the ropes", being initiated into the "culture of Technikon A", involving the way the institution operates. It is from being an outsider to becoming an insider; it is a process by which newcomers understand and appreciate the values, abilities, expected behaviour and social knowledge essential for assuming an organisational role and for participating as an organisational member.

The researcher recommends that new secretaries should be shown at the outset how things are done at Technikon A. For example, how to reply when answering a telephone and how documents should be typed. Mentors should demonstrate

this to new secretaries and any other tasks, so that they know exactly how to do things. When new secretaries are introduced to staff members they should be apprised of the correct form of address; including titles, so that they are not embarrassed by their mistakes.

New recruits should also be given information about conditions of employment, the prevailing code of ethics and confidentiality policies (which are crucial) as well as facts about the working environment, facilities, and amenities (Gerber, *et al* 1995). It is also valuable to explain some of the technical and administrative resources they can access, such as, for example, the audio visual section, where they can hire video cassettes, and the resources of the library.

4.3.4 DEALING WITH STUDENTS AND THE PUBLIC

Secretaries are at the same time both a link to and a barrier between their superiors and the public. Members of the public would like to come into heads of department offices for a chat. It is a secretary's duty to see to it that she/he is not unnecessarily disturbed. Sometimes secretaries serve as barriers, which is neither an easy nor a pleasant task. Their responsibilities are extensive for they are their heads' personal organisers and therefore have to decide who may see her/him and who may not. Moreover they have the responsibility for deciding whether students may see heads of department or not and which matters require immediate

attention and which can wait. Having all this power means that secretaries have to be taught how to deal with staff members, students and the general public.

New secretaries also have to develop skills in handling people. This should be done professionally and in a sensitive and kind manner (Steenekamp and Bekker, 1987). As they deal with students, they are expected to know how to handle queries: for example, they handle queries about student loans, timetables, test marks and other matters relating to students. Departments should train their secretaries to deal with these matters so that they develop efficiency in handling them.

The researcher recommends that there should be departmental meetings during which "who deals with what" is clarified. For example, if there are student queries regarding experiential learning, new secretaries should be informed to whom they should be referred. Departments will also benefit by sending new secretaries to public relations courses dealing with interaction with the general public: they will learn how to deal with people and know how to handle the different situations which may arise. Their skills in dealing with the general public may well enhance the image of the organisation as well as their own departments.

4.3.5 COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Communication, whether verbal or written, is vital to any organisation's success. English dominates the business world today, both locally and internationally. For this reason, everyone who is involved in business should practise their communication skills and, improve both grammar and spelling (Badenhorst, *et al*, 2002).

A head of department relies to a certain extent on her/his secretary to make corrections to correspondence, reports and other business documents. Telephone-answering also forms part of communication. As discussed earlier, new secretaries frequently encounter problems when they answer the telephone: they may be embarrassed if they are overheard by someone in the office, they may be hesitant in replying to queries. Telephonic conversations often display a secretary's ignorance and poor language ability.

The correct use of language is necessary when conversing with people. A number of new secretaries encounter problems when using English, if this is a second language. This problem has increased with the numbers of new recruits in affirmative action posts. Heads of department have to ensure that they groom their secretaries to become good communicators. This can be done by sending them to courses where they will be taught conversation, including how to reply when

confronted by various communication challenges. For example, how to handle a difficult person who wants to see a head of department without an appointment. Tact and good communication, when dealing with students, staff and visitors can contribute greatly to avoiding unpleasant scenes.

A public relations course designed to solve problems of this kind should be part of an induction programme. Training a new secretary how to deal with the public, to know what to say and when to say it may contribute to building the image of Technikon A and its departments.

4.3.6 DRESS AND DEPARTMENT

New incumbents should be informed of the correct dress code so that they do not come to work wearing jeans, slip ons, caps and takkies. They should know what is suitable for the office and what is not. For example, elaborate hairstyles are inappropriate. Correct clothes, good grooming and an overall pleasant presentation are important in building a winning image for one's department.

Senior secretaries (especially those who are mentors) can work together and invite fashion stores to show "work and leisure wear" at Technikon A. This will also benefit those who have been with Technikon A for sometime, but have a problem in identifying correct office clothing.

A secretary is a link with the outside world and occupies a respected position within the hierarchy of an organisation, therefore her/his manners and conduct should be irreproachable. Use of language, sitting, standing and walking, conduct in the office, personal hygiene and eating habits should always be beyond reproach (Steenekamp and Bekker, 1987). A good knowledge of the rules of etiquette are also essential. Heads of department should always encourage impeccable behaviour and this should always be emphasised in a new secretary's induction programme.

4.3.7 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

It is most important that a new secretary should be aware of other people's cultures, their religious beliefs and also their mannerisms. South Africa's workforce is multicultural and diverse and secretaries, by the nature of their work, deal with many different people. A new secretary should be taught to make an effort to understand people and their practices and be sensitive to them: for example, when is it acceptable to shake hands or embrace; what religious customs prevail (Kent, 1998).

A head of department who knows the staff in a department should discuss these matters with a new secretary. It is, however, the responsibility of new secretaries to equip themselves with this knowledge. There are some basic guidelines that an

efficient, well-prepared secretary can follow to enhance communication and good relations with people from different cultures. She/he can start by learning key phrases, words such as “please” and “thank you”. These are important phrases and they show that a secretary cares.

Secretaries today are very fortunate because they have access to all the information they need: they can use the internet and library or buy a book from a bookshop and read about different cultures.

4.3.8 WELCOME TO THE INSTITUTION - THE INAUGURATION

The old expression “first impressions are lasting impressions” definitely applies to the new secretaries. One of the longest lasting impressions new recruits have of their employers is how they were greeted and treated on their first day of work. This initial contact is long remembered by employees.

Welcoming new secretaries is the responsibility of the head of department but the help of a senior secretary from another department may be enlisted. At this time the head of department or a designated representative should introduce the new recruit to staff with whom she/he will be working closely.

Part of the welcome is also for the head of department to give the new secretary a sense of belonging, of feeling “comfortable” and “at home” in this new atmosphere. During this conversation, the head of department should clarify her/his expectations because although many organisations provide a written job description, even the most detailed documents leave something out. The head of department should go over expectations, point-by-point, ensuring that the new secretary understands and is comfortable with them. It should never be assumed that the new recruit already knows basic tasks, even if transferred from another department. Knowledge and culture differ from department to department and from organisation to organisation. It is wise to initially address these issues and not assume that a new secretary will ask about them or pick them up through trial and error.

4.3.9 NETWORKING ENCOURAGED

Networking involves the art of developing and maintaining professional relationships with others in a secretary’s field. Nobody works in a vacuum. It has advantages for both employers and secretaries (Blueprint, 2001). For this reason, heads of department should have pointed out to their new secretaries the individuals with whom they may have common interests and may affect their new jobs. The new secretaries’ success will likely hinge on their ability to form strong relationships or network with these individuals. Heads of department should also help new recruits meet and have discussions with secretaries from other

departments and organisations. They should also be given information about professional bodies they can join, for example, the Professional Secretaries' Association. By doing so they will broaden their knowledge about their jobs.

The Department of Office Technology at Technikon A celebrates a Secretaries' Day each year. It is also a pleasant way of welcoming new secretaries and encouraging networking among them. Therefore, it is advisable to invite them to this function. Among the invited guests will be secretaries who trained at Technikon A and who are doing exceptionally well where they are employed. Technikon A's new secretaries should get an opportunity to meet them and discuss with them anything related to their jobs. They will also have an opportunity of learning from speeches delivered on Secretaries' Day.

4.3.10 UPGRADING AND INSERVICE COURSES

It is a fact that new secretaries do not know everything about their jobs and so, depending on their performance, will be called on, from time to time to attend courses to upgrade their secretarial skills. Also technology has changed the roles and responsibilities of secretaries; for example, they have to extract information from the internet and they should know how to send messages via e-mail. They face many challenges in their daily tasks. It is important that they are up-to-date with these changes. The way Technikon A's work is conducted is also changing,

and as secretaries are pillars of the organisation, they have to keep abreast of what is happening around them.

Technikon A is in a fortunate position to offer inservice courses, for example, the Information Technology Department usually offers courses on computer software programmes that are new on the market. Heads of department should allow their new secretaries to be trained on courses to sharpen their skills. The Department of Office Technology also offers courses in secretarial skills (usually for outside organisations) and may be approached to do the same for new secretaries in Technikon A.

4.3.11 DEVELOPMENTAL APPRAISAL

After three months, when a new secretary has had time to adjust to the department and institution and has been immersed in her/his new role, heads of department should check the progress made. This should be done by having meetings with both secretaries and their mentors. These meetings will give new incumbents an opportunity to discuss major problems (if any) and indicate how they feel about their progress. Mentors and shadowers should also meet with heads of department to discuss further induction programmes for these secretaries if these are necessary.

Finally, the researcher recommends that the Human Resources Department of Technikon A and all departments in the institution should conduct an annual evaluation of the induction programme. The purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether it meets the needs of both Technikon A and the new secretaries and to ascertain ways of improving it.

4.4 CONCLUSION

An induction programme, which include all these recommendations, will benefit individual secretaries, departments and Technikon A. Secretaries are the pillars of every department in an organisation so it is important that heads of department work closely with the Human Resources Department of Technikon A and draw up an induction programme for their new secretaries. This will also save a department's time in teaching new secretaries their tasks and will help them to fit into their jobs as soon as they join Technikon A.

Mentors should be carefully selected to help new secretaries. A senior secretary can also "shadow" a new secretary until she/he is fully acquainted with her/his new job. Technikon A and its departments can benefit from well organised, well presented and popular programmes of induction. Among the benefits would be a better understanding of Technikon A's policies, goals and procedures, improved performance as a result of using mentors and shadowers and fewer costly and

time-consuming mistakes. In addition there is the benefit of creating a sense of belonging among new incumbents by showing them how their jobs are done and how they fit into the overall organisation and helping them to establish good relationships with students, staff and visitors.

4.5 SUMMARY

Chapter Four outlined the researcher's recommendations for Technikon A. There is a need for a well organised induction programme for secretaries, which will include all the information relevant to help them to perform their jobs efficiently. Heads of department should appoint mentors and can also use the shadowing system to ensure that new secretaries are given support and assistance, should the need arise. Heads of department will, therefore, prevent a situation in which new secretaries are left to struggle on their own, ignorant of what to do and whom to contact when they encounter problems.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: SECRETARIES

1. How long have you been employed by Technikon A?

2. ☐ A: Joined Technikon A straight from training college?

☐ B: Were you transferred from another department?

☐ C: Promoted to your present position from within your department?

☐ D: Joined Technikon A from another organisation?

3. Were you inducted into your job when you joined Technikon A?

4. If your answer is Yes, into which of the following were you inducted ?

☐ How to answer the telephone?

☐ Operating the computer - how to log in and out?

☐ Typing documents according to Technikon A's requirements?

☐ Arranging conferences or seminars?

☐ Handling difficult visitors or callers?

Other:

.....

5. After the induction programme, were you able to:-

A. Answer the telephone correctly?

B. Operate the computer on your own?

C. Type documents according to requirements?

D. Arrange conferences or seminars?

E. Handle difficult callers, either calling in person or telephonically?

Other:

6. Is there anything else you learnt from the induction?

Specify:

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

7. Does your department have an induction programme for new secretaries?

If the answer is Yes, please state what is included in the programme:

.....

If the answer is No, is there a reason why:

.....

If the answer is No, questions 8, 9 and 10 will not be asked.

8. Does your department have a senior secretary who serves as a "mentor" to the new secretary.

9. Does your department work with the Human Resources Department to induct new secretaries.

10. Does your department work on its own to induct new secretaries?
