

The Role of the Assistant Manager in Contemporary Economy

~ Mirea Iuliana-Cristina (Faculty of Business and Administration)

Abstract: This paper represents an incursion in the problematic of the secretariat activity and managerial assistance in the contemporary administrative system, seen as a general – particular analysis in which from a general perspective regarding the secretariat and managerial assistance activity and its role we then analyse the practical secretariat practices.

In addition to presenting the activity of the assistant manager, which has already been standardized (circulation and writing correspondence, documentary and archive operations, and so on), special attention has been paid to “connecting” any action of the assistant manager to real actions of the manager, taking into consideration the condition of complementary which is specific for this relation.

Keywords: bureautics, secretariat, assistant manager, new economy

The automatizing of informational and communicational technologies has created multiple and irreversible changes in the economical and administrative activity, which has caused the continuous improvement of the human factor for the efficient use of these technologies. Bureautics appeared as an answer to all necessities and it represents “the totality of informative and teleinformative techniques, concerning the automatizing of

secretariat and administrative tasks, of office activities”.¹

Contemporary economy is dominated by global influences and increasing speed of communication and information. In special literature, it is considered that its basic characteristics are globalization and digitalization. Authors working in this domain treat the new economy almost only from the point

¹ *Le petit Larousse*, Larrousse Press, Paris, 2002;

of view of informatics and international relationship. Considering these aspects, the needs of the good management can be felt at any organizational level, no matter the activity field, under many aspects, some of which are: grater necessity to offer new information, growth of productivity for office activities, adopting a decentralization technique and also using the facilities in informatics, telecommunications and telematics .

About **secretariat**, as a function in contemporary administrative structures, we can talk beginning with the industrial era, which was characterized by the acceleration of work division. Secretariat is generally defined as "the service that intensifies the work of the manager in all functional aspects, contributing to the rational organisation of the activity of superior managers in the firm or a group of specialized people, with complex individual activities and tasks, reunited under a hierarchic authority".² Also, the effective use of the secretariat is an essential way of amplifying the effectiveness of the managerial work. Thus secretariats have become real "communicational knots"³, with the role of offering optimal conditions for the realisation of operational and effective contacts by the manager. Contemporary secretariats work in any system, in any type of organisation, at any level and in any field of contemporary life.

The secretariat activity is structured in specialised compartments and has a large generalisation. It takes place at different levels, in central organs of state administration, local representatives of central administration, as well as at the level of economical

agents and units with different profiles.

The secretariat activity in the system of public administration has certain particularities which are different from those of private administration, as a consequence to the fact that the management of public institutions and the organisational structure are different from those of private organisation.

The role of secretariat in the context of contemporary economy endorses two major aspects:

➤ "Interface of the management with the personnel and with people outside the institution

➤ A geminating of auxiliary directions through taking over specific attributions at compartment level. The secretary takes over a series of attributions regarding personnel, administrative activities, public relation activities"⁴

Nowadays, two concepts regarding the secretariat activity can be identified: the secretary and the assistant manager. The **secretary** is considered "the person with enough knowledge about the management activity and the sphere in which it takes place, in order to be able to make decisions, to give instructions and represent the executive in different situations".⁵ Once with the introduction of the concept of management, the term of secretary seems to be replaced by **assistant manager** in what concerns private firms. In the organisational structure of a firm, the position of assistant manager represents a superior professional step, implying

² **Nicolescu, Ovidiu; Verboncu, I.,** *Management*, Bucharest: Economic Press, 1996, page 165;

³ **Pariza, Maria,** *Secretariat and managerial assistance course*, Bucharest: C.H. Beck Press, 2008, page. 6;

⁴ **Vârgolici, Nina,** *Secretariat and managerial assistance techniques*, Bucharest: Bucharest University Press, 2004, page. 8;

⁵ **Pariza, Maria,** *Secretariat and managerial assistance course*, Bucharest: C.H.Beck Press, 2008,page. 8;

"responsibilities outside the context of professional abilities characteristic to traditional secretariat".⁶ There are situations in which the post of assistant manager is closer to that of manager, "executive assistant" being the second person in the executive chain. The position of assistant manager implies economical, management, marketing, administrative law, social psychology, public relation and communication knowledge. As a consequence, unlike the secretary, the assistant manager is a part of superior hierarchic structures, as a first subordinate, and at the same time a close assistant to the manager.

The work of the assistant manager is quite complex and varies depending on the position, the activity field, the level of responsibility and the size of the organisation. Independent to these criteria, a great deal of qualities and abilities are required.

In a secretariat, the work of the assistant manager involves a complex of activities:

- Administrative activities such as: processing and sending messages, writing in shorthand, multiplying and classifying documents, registering correspondence;
- Activities included in the description of the position, such as: documentation, correspondence, protocol, organising celebrations;
- Activities developed by their own initiative, such as courses for subordinate secretaries.

Nowadays, the assistant manager holds an indispensable position for the good functioning of the organisation of which she/he is

a part. He works for others, his work is put to use for other people's work. The profession of assistant manager is not an independent work; the assistant manager is always connected to a certain person or a certain department. Taking into consideration the condition of being complementary, directed towards the same purpose, the relationship between the assistant manager and the manager involves a strict organised and synchronized collaboration. The assistant manager must inform the manager correctly, fully and on time. The adopted decisions and the transmitted injunctions must be understood correctly, with exactness and responsibility. "An ideal assistant manager must gradually get to know his manager so well as to predict his intentions and anticipate his reactions, thinking like him and maintaining his one's own personality".⁷ In time, the assistant manager becomes a direct auxiliary and indispensable to the manager, more than that, he is an extension of his position. Long experiments have proved that continuous dialogue, the quality of communication, are the fundament for creating a better collaboration between the manager and his assistant. A study made by Panasonic Industrial Company and Professional Secretaries International on the activity of 4000 secretaries has emphasised the fact that 70% did not communicate enough with the manager, 50% were not well informed on the global problems the firm has to deal with, 36% of them did not know their tasks.

The relations of the assistant manager with the other departments inside the organisation are relations of cooperation, thus

⁶ Pariza, Maria. *Secretariat and managerial assistance course*, Bucharest: C.H.Beck Press, 2008, page. 9;

⁷ Pariza, Maria. *Secretariat and managerial assistance course*, Bucharest: C.H.Beck Press, 2008, page. 12;

solving a series of spontaneous professional problems which occur with certain periodicity. These relations are spontaneous, caused by the necessity of commune elaboration of paperwork, being later confirmed officially. The role of the assistant manager is that of assuring the conditions for a good deployment of the relations with other external firms.

Thus, the assistant manager is the one to contribute to the public image of an organisation. He is the first person to come in contact with the representatives of the relation environment of the organisation. The assistant manager can greatly influence the image of the organisation he represents. A favourable image leads to the increase of public trust and thus to benefit growth. The requests addressed to the assistant manager are various, including simple information, releasing documents, even complex situations of communication in the absence of the manager. The manner in which visitors are regarded, the manner in which certain information are communicated to them, the way in which the secretary addresses the clients transmit something about the demands of the organisation. Practice confirms that an elevated, consequent and level-headed behaviour can influence any person the assistant manager comes in contact with.

Current studies in management insist upon the effectiveness and efficiency of managerial work. The diminution or elimination the causes which induce deficiency imply taking action in various main directions:

► „Scientifically programming and organising of managerial work

1. *Respecting a set of programming and organising rules* (difficult and important problems are to be solved in the first hours of the

morning, and less important problems are to be solved to the end of the day; efforts are to be concentrated on key problems, which determine the success of a certain field);

2. *Using a diversified work programming instrument* (the use of methods, techniques and work programming means such as daily and weekly activity programme, daily and weekly activity graphics, problem file, is recommended);

► Rational organising of work

Considering that the main raw material of an assistant manager is information, the insurance of good work conditions is necessary.

► Optimising collaboration with other compartments

The key factor for a better collaboration between the assistant manager and personnel in other departments is permanent communication, put across by:

- building trust between parties involved;
- establishing clear missions and purposes;
- conducting active decision processes.⁸

The work of an assistant manager involves activities that excuse the manager from a series of routine actions which are only administrative, thus contributing to the rational use of working time, but also activities which ensure accurate manipulation of information at management level and last but not least activities which ensure preliminary conditions for the fruition of efficient and operational contracts by the manager in organisational

⁸ Adaptation REUTER – GARJENS, Margit; BEHRENS, Claudia. Secretariat and managerial assistance manual. Bucharest: Technical Press, 2001, page. 289;

communication in all forms and under all aspects. All these activities lead to delineating the main tasks an assistant manager fulfils inside an organisation, which are:

1) The task of handling information and documents;

2) The task of communicational liaison and "filter";

3) The task of representing;

4) The task of direct assistance of the manager.

„The task of handling information and documents“	“The task of direct assistance of the manager”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - receiving and sorting mail; - internal distribution and sending long distance mail; - providing information and communicating management decisions; - writing mail; - saving information and keeping the documents which are useful to the leader (classifying, archiving, indexing); - saving information and keeping the documents which are useful to the manager; - providing materials for visual communication; - writing reports, abstracts, translating; - providing materials necessary in the elaboration of projects; pregătirea unor materiale necesare pentru elaborarea unor proiecte; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - participating in organising the manager's activity by programming different meetings, daily renewing the agenda, laying down calendars of tasks and works, supervising the development of deploying works and informing the manager on digressions and dead lines; - direct assistance in business meetings, reunions; - fulfilling administrative tasks (administering equipment, performing primary accounting operations, respecting ergonomic rules, etc).
The task of representing	The task of communicational liaison and “filter”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparing discussions with outer persons; - Receiving visitors and assuring a pleasant environment; - Accurately directing and informing the visitors in the absence of the manager; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring phone connections in all communicational directions of the organization; - „Filtering” the requests for direct and indirect contacts with the manager; - Monitoring the direct requests and phone calls in the absence of the manager and informing him on the matter; - Keeping evidence of phone numbers and useful addresses;”

Leadership as a task of the assistant manager

The assistant manager is the main responsible for the success of the organisation.

► Conducting discussions and the technique of negotiation

The assistant manager negotiates with external service offers (travelling agencies, hotels, seminary offers, caterers, and so on).

► Motivation

The assistant manager represents a communication bridge for problems that may occur between employers and employees. He is put in the situation of intermediating in individual cases, acknowledging the proof of harassment and the phenomenon of internal resignation.

► Handling information

"The assistant manager uses as an information communication central the technical possibilities of the Internet and of the continuous development of networks – and the possibility of having permanent access to an unimaginable variety of information and the ability of processing".⁹

► Administrating meetings

The assistant manager prepares the meetings, hosts them and pursues the deference of conventions. There are also cases in which he also puts up control dates in order to avoid loss through frictions and in order to guarantee cooperation.

► Administrating projects

The assistant manager takes up positions regarding the composition of teams and the collaboration between employees inside projects. She/He ensures professional and

organisational continuity even beyond the time limits of projects.

► Replacement task

As standing in for the manager, the assistant manager decides if matters are so important as to inform the managers – whether it can wait until the manager's return or if it must be transmitted to a third party.

► Management function regarding tasks

"The assistant manager takes over from the chiefs functions of partial leadership which are delegated by the manager; for example, coordinating travelling activities and approving the ability to give dispositions when the employees must be informed out of acceptance reasons."¹⁰

► Administrating time and work techniques

Through the own appliance of time administration and work techniques, the assistant manager must be able to handle his own work amount and support the managers in increasing the efficiency of time administration.

► Control functions

"The assistant manager supervises business transactions and respecting dead lines by the managers, employees and outside service providers."¹¹

According to a study of Fraunhofer on **the role of the assistant manager from the contemporary economy perspective**, it confirms the fact that the traditional secretary, the one to elaborate, process and administrate documents upon a model during more than half of her work time, spending the rest

⁹ Klein, Barbara. *From secretariat to office management*. Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag Press, 1996, page. 37;

¹⁰ Reuter – Garjens, Margit; Behrens, Claudia. *Ssecretariat and managerial assistance manual*. Bucharest: Technical Press, 2001, page. 293;

¹¹ *Ibidem*

of her time answering phone calls, is slowly but surely to disappear. Also regarding future secretaries, three opinion tendencies have been expressed.

A first tendency considers that the role of the assistant manager is overwhelmed and will eventually disappear. Arguments for this trend are in close connection with the evolution of computers.

The second tendency contradicts the first one and argues that the role of the assistant manager is in continuous growth and neither the computer nor other technical discoveries will manage to replace it.

The third tendency alleges that in the future the assistant manager will overcome her current professional statute and that her role will involve her in paraprofessional activities. This tendency brings in the foreground a new concept, that of administrative manager.

Conclusions

In what concerns the profession of secretary in Romania, it represents one of the most exposed to transformations after 1989, once with the breaching of improved office equipment and multiple changes brought about in managerial politics. Under these circumstances, numerous professional training possibilities have been created in the Romanian educational system, which are compatible with the educational system in European countries.

Nowadays, we are witnessing an orientation of secretariat work towards efficiency and increased complexity, which means going over from the traditional secretary to the assistant manager. As a synopsis, such an orientation is materialized in the following aspects:

Comparison Element	Traditional Secretary	Assistant Manager
<i>Work complexity</i>	Given and unknown	In growth and continuous dynamics
<i>Operations</i>	Attained repetitively, in routine conditions	Based on standards and new challenges
<i>Relation with the manager</i>	Subordination and execution	Coordination and collaboration
<i>Decisions</i>	Regarding self managing of documents	Regarding more complex activities, beyond the secretariat activity limit
<i>Communication abilities</i>	Standard formulas	Extended
<i>Work efficiency</i>	Limited	In growth
<i>Unrolled activities</i>	In conditions of self managing the time	In situations of managerial performance of secretariat activities
<i>Free initiative</i>	Limited	In development
<i>Unrolled processes</i>	Following rules and procedures	According to clear standards and activity easing principles
<i>Career development</i>	Interest limited	Permanent preoccupation

The ideal assistant manager must prove “the sense of a diplomat, the modesty of a mule, the adaptability of a chameleon, the punctuality of the sun, the speed of light,

the loyalty of a sister, the skin of a rhino, the mind of Einstein, the understanding of a mother and the patience of Hiob”.

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