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OFFICE ASSISTANTS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS: THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT OFFICE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: The study was conducted to determine the extent of practice of the roles of office assistants in the management of the office, assess the effectiveness of their duties and responsibilities, identify the common challenges they face, and examine the difference in perceptions between office assistants and their immediate supervisors. Using a descriptive survey method supported by interviews, data were gathered from 44 participants, composed of 26 office assistants and 18 executives from the local government units of Kapangan, Benguet. Despite the relatively small sample, the study ensured comprehensive population coverage to minimize bias. Findings revealed that office assistants consistently performed their roles in areas such as communication, organizational efficiency, time management, technical proficiency, interpersonal relationships, and adaptability. Among these, interpersonal relationships were most frequently practiced, while time management was the least. Their duties and responsibilities were rated highly effective, particularly in organizational efficiency, while technical proficiency was found to be the least effective. A significant difference was observed in how office assistants and executives perceived the assistants' performance and contributions. The most common challenges encountered by office assistants included limited access to technology and tools, poor time management, heavy administrative workloads, communication issues, and lack of professional development opportunities. Despite these, office assistants were seen as essential contributors to the smooth functioning of executive offices, with their communication, organizational, and interpersonal competencies playing a vital role. The study highlighted the need for targeted strategies to address technological gaps, workload management, and professional growth.

Keywords: office assistants, executive support, communication, organizational efficiency, public service, professional development

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I. INTRODUCTION

The changing landscape of modern organizations has brought to light the critical role of office assistants. Once limited to administrative and clerical tasks, office assistants are now recognized as essential contributors to executive functions such as planning, decision-making, task prioritization, and overall organizational productivity. The role of office assistants has evolved significantly over the past decades, transitioning from traditional clerical support to becoming strategic partners within organizations. Driven by rapid technological advancement, globalization, and dynamic workplace environments, the modern office assistant is now expected to contribute directly to executive decision-making, planning, and task prioritization. This transformation is especially evident in technology-enhanced workplaces where automation and digital platforms allow assistants to go beyond routine tasks and engage in complex coordination and analytical functions. Their contributions now span scheduling, project management, communication oversight, and the alignment of daily operations with broader strategic goals.

Modern office assistants are also defined by their adaptability and interpersonal skills. In increasingly multicultural and fast-paced work settings, they are tasked with fostering team cohesion, navigating interpersonal dynamics, and maintaining effective communication channels between staff and executives. Their influence on workplace morale and organizational culture is substantial, with many now assuming leadership roles in managing office systems, overseeing record-keeping, and ensuring information accuracy. Historical records depict office assistants as disciplined and organized contributors to wartime and postwar workforce structures, a legacy that informs their resilience and competence in today's modern offices.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transformation, demanding that assistants quickly adapt to remote technologies and new workflows. Office assistants emerged as key players in maintaining business continuity, managing virtual communication platforms, coordinating remote schedules, and addressing unprecedented disruptions in administrative operations. Studies increasingly highlight that assistants proficient in emotional intelligence, cultural competence, and technology integration are instrumental in executive support. These individuals serve as mediators between leadership and the workforce, enabling seamless communication and efficient execution of strategic initiatives.

Particularly in public and rural sectors, such as in the local government units (LGUs) of Kapangan, Benguet, the roles of office assistants are indispensable yet underappreciated. Their responsibilities include maintaining communication efficiency, supporting task delegation, managing time and data effectively, and addressing administrative bottlenecks. However, many assistants face challenges including limited training, role ambiguity, and lack of career advancement opportunities. Through theoretical lenses such as Cultural Mediation Theory, Adaptive Functionality Theory, and Role Theory, the study underscores the need for organizational support structures that recognize and nurture the evolving functions of office assistants. By documenting these changes and proposing actionable recommendations—such as capacity-building initiatives, policy enhancements, and clearer job definitions—this study contributes valuable insight into how office assistants can be empowered to further enhance workplace productivity and executive effectiveness.

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II. METHODOLOGY

The current study made use of a descriptive-survey method of research as it gave information concerning the current status of the phenomenon to describe "what exists" concerning variables or conditions in a situation.

Descriptive research is a quantitative research method that seeks to describe characteristics, behaviors, and patterns within a specific population or phenomenon without manipulating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). It aims to answer the what, when, where, and how questions of a study, but does not establish cause-and-effect relationships. It is appropriate for the researcher because it helps understand existing conditions, making it useful for exploratory and preliminary studies.

Survey research is a specific data collection method used in descriptive studies, where researchers gather information from a sample population using structured tools like questionnaires, interviews, or online forms (McMillan & Schumacher, 2022). It allows the researcher to collect data from many respondents quickly and cost-effectively. The results can be analyzed using statistical methods, making it easier to identify trends and patterns, and well-designed surveys with representative samples increase the reliability of research findings (Babbie, 2021).

Data Gathering tool

The survey questionnaire is the principal quantitative tool for this research. It was designed to capture specific information about the contributions of office assistants to executive functions. The questionnaires focused on the roles, responsibilities, and self-assessment of the contributions of office assistants to the executive's office functions.

The questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first part is the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. The other parts involved the extent of practice, degree of effectiveness, and challenges encountered by office assistants in the practice of their duties and responsibilities.

The researcher constructed the questionnaire based on the forms used by Daemen College (n.d.), Tofform (n.d.), Northern New Mexico College (n.d.), South Eastern Special Education (n.d.), William's Bay School District (2021), and government offices.

To establish its reliability, the questionnaire was pre-tested on 15 office assistants and 12 executives of different offices at Cordillera Career Development College, who were not the actual respondents of the study.

Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The computed alpha was 0.95, with a descriptive equivalent of strongly reliable, indicating that the tool is reliable.

To deepen the understanding gathered from the initial data, follow-up interviews were conducted with the same respondent using online applications. The questions asked during the interviews focused on clarifying why certain categories and sub-indicators got high or low ratings. The purpose of this was to clarify some of the previous responses, explore emerging themes more deeply, and gather additional insights that would enrich the overall findings of the study.

Data Analysis

The study utilized a descriptive-survey research design to gather quantitative and qualitative data from office assistants and executives. A total of 44 respondents participated, including 26 office assistants and 18 executives from various LGUs in Kapangan. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with relevant experience and exposure to office functions.

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A structured questionnaire served as the primary data-gathering tool. It covered socio-demographic information, extent of role practice, perceived effectiveness, and encountered challenges. The tool was pre-tested and validated, yielding a high reliability score (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.95). Supplementary interviews provided deeper insights into participant experiences and contextual factors affecting their roles.

III. Result and Discussion

Extent of Practice of Roles and Responsibilities. Office assistants were found to consistently perform their duties with a high level of practice, receiving an overall mean of 3.38, categorized as "Always Practiced." Among the six areas assessed, interpersonal relationships received the highest mean score (3.55), indicating that office assistants play a crucial role in maintaining professional interactions, managing workplace harmony, and fostering trust and cooperation across departments. Communication skills followed closely (3.51), highlighting assistants' commitment to clear, concise, and respectful exchanges. Adaptability and learning (3.47) were also highly practiced, showing that office assistants actively seek growth and adjustment in response to changing work environments.

Organizational skills and technical proficiency both scored 3.29, reflecting solid performance in maintaining structured filing systems and using basic digital tools. However, time management scored the lowest (3.18), with specific challenges noted in task prioritization and workload balancing. Although these scores still fall within the "Always Practiced" range, they point to areas needing improvement through structured support and skill development.

Degree of Effectiveness of Duties and Responsibilities. In terms of effectiveness, office assistants were rated as "Highly Effective" with an overall mean of 3.44. Both office assistants and their immediate supervisors rated organizational efficiency as the highest-performing category, with effective coordination of meetings, maintenance of records, and handling of supplies seen as key contributions. Communication (3.52) and professional growth (3.48) also ranked highly, reflecting strong support in facilitating executive functions and willingness to assume greater responsibility. However, technical proficiency (3.26) was the least effective area, with office assistants reporting challenges in using advanced features of digital tools and resolving IT-related issues.

This effectiveness is attributed to their independence in managing tasks with minimal supervision, their problem-solving abilities, and their adaptability to office demands. Supervisors often rated assistants slightly higher than assistants rated themselves, particularly in areas like conflict resolution, proactive problem-solving, and the ability to provide digital transformation support.

Differences in Perceptions Between Office Assistants and Executives. A statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of office assistants and their executive supervisors, with a p-value of 0.000. Executives tended to rate office assistants higher, especially in communication and problem-solving. This suggests a level of trust and satisfaction with assistants' performance, even though assistants may not fully recognize their impact or may focus more on their daily difficulties. The divergence in perceptions points to the potential for feedback and mentoring programs that align self-assessment with executive expectations.

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Challenges Encountered in Performing Duties and Responsibilities. The study identified eight categories of challenges faced by office assistants, with technology and tools being the most prevalent. A recurring theme was the lack of structured training in digital tools, including advanced features of office software and troubleshooting IT issues. Assistants often had to learn independently, which resulted in delays, stress, and underperformance in tech-heavy tasks.

Time management was the second-most cited challenge with issues such as overlapping deadlines, urgent last-minute requests, and difficulty prioritizing tasks in high-pressure environments. Administrative workload, communication barriers, and lack of professional development also surfaced as significant obstacles. Other noted challenges included poor organizational structure, interpersonal conflicts, and emotional stress linked to workload and limited recognition.

Office assistants expressed feelings of undervaluation and job stagnation, especially due to a lack of feedback and unclear job expectations. Some indicated that while they performed tasks beyond their job description, such efforts often went unnoticed. This aligns with Herzberg's two-factor theory and equity theory, which emphasize recognition and fairness as motivators of employee satisfaction.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that office assistants consistently fulfill their roles with competence, particularly excelling in interpersonal relations, communication, and adaptability. They are reliable collaborators who effectively support both executives and department coordination. Despite these strengths, there are notable areas for improvement, particularly in time management and technical proficiency, which require focused training and support.

While office assistants and their immediate supervisors differ significantly in how they perceive assistants' effectiveness, both acknowledge their valuable contributions—especially in enhancing communication, fostering professional growth, and supporting organizational efficiency. However, limited access to digital tools and technology restricts the full realization of their potential.

Moreover, office assistants face multifaceted challenges in their daily responsibilities. Chief among these are difficulties related to technology use, insufficient training, time constraints, and high administrative workloads. Additional issues include communication barriers and a lack of structured professional development. These challenges highlight the growing need for office assistants to possess not only administrative and technical skills, but also adaptability and emotional resilience to thrive in today's dynamic work environments.

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