

ELECTRONIC OFFICE PROCEDURES

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ELECTRONIC OFFICE PROCEDURES

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Electronic Office Procedures

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Preface

"Information flow will be more important than the hierarchy."¹

Peter Drucker, Clarke Professor of Social Sciences and Management at the Claremont Graduate School, California, and well-known author of business management books, made this statement in reference to the changing structure of the electronic office.

In the same article Drucker wrote that he disliked the word *automation* because it emphasized machines, "whereas what we are really talking about is *organizing work around the flow of information*" (emphasis added).

Electronic Office Procedures gives you a detailed view of how the information processing cycle is being changed by today's technology. It shows you how and why this change is taking place. It recognizes that today "knowledge workers"—among whom are the office employees—make up more than half of the work force. The text clearly describes the processing of information—inputting, processing, outputting, storing, and distributing—contrasting procedures in traditional and electronic offices.

To help you put into perspective and comprehend the changes that are occurring and to help you see how they have evolved, the text discusses the three stages of the business office: the traditional office, the word processing office, and the electronic office. This approach serves two purposes:

- ☐ First, all three types of offices exist today, so this text prepares you for work in any one of them.
- ☐ Second, by detailing how the electronic office evolved out of the traditional office and the ways it changed procedures, the text makes it easier for you to understand the new procedures and your role.

The electronic office makes it possible to process great amounts of information quickly and accurately. In the course of this text, you will learn about the kinds of equipment available for processing information and how you will use such procedures as *electronic mail*, *electronic records management*, and *teleconferencing* in the electronic office. The text makes it clear, however, that doing tasks faster is not the sole difference in the electronic office. Functions themselves are changed. Office workers are doing things differently.

¹Peter Drucker, in *On Human Factors*—a source booklet of comments and observations by experts in the field of human factors and office automation, Wang Laboratories, Inc., 1983.

The traditional division of office work between managers on the one hand and administrative support workers on the other is blurring. The text shows how office functions are being rethought and redefined in the face of the new technology. New job descriptions reflect new responsibilities and assignments. All of this, as the book shows, adds up to new opportunities and challenges for the office worker.

The increasing use of sophisticated technology has tremendous implications for those entering the business office, especially those who see themselves moving into supervisory and even managerial roles in the years ahead. As you will read, the new technology can open up avenues of advancement that previously did not exist.

The successful office employee of the future will need to be familiar with more than one function. Specialists will still be needed, of course, in areas such as word processing and data processing. But increasingly, all office workers will be expected to perform many different *information processing* functions. The sophisticated computer systems described in *Electronic Office Procedures* make this not only desirable but also possible.

Secretaries, administrative assistants, and future office managers being trained today must acquire certain skills to be data processors, systems analysts, information system managers, and utility managers, as well as word processors or data processors. Those wishing to advance will need to have knowledge of how systems work. One section of this book deals with the issues and decisions a company faces when establishing an electronic system. Having the ability to train others, both new personnel and managers, in the use of a new system will be necessary.

To an increasing extent, data processing, systems analysis, and the management of information systems will be an integral part of the future office worker's job rather than separate functions. New job titles reflect this broadening scope of responsibilities: *information processing specialist* and *information processing supervisor* are two examples, as you will read.

Machines by themselves are powerless. Information that is unused is worthless. People continue to be the main element in the electronic office, as this text makes clear. Human relations skills, important as ever, are interwoven with technical information in this text, which stresses those that are important to your career. Ultimately, it is the integration of people and machines that makes a system work.

You will learn about the traditional leadership skills still required and look at how the decision to automate an office is made and then implemented. You will read about job opportunities in the electronic office and the ways to launch your successful career.

This text will prepare you for entering a business world in which you will find traditional systems alongside electronic systems. It points out the significant trends. By keeping informed of the new technology, making sense of it,

and, most important, grasping its implications—none of which is an easy task—you can have an exciting and interesting career in the business office of the eighties and nineties.

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Many other people contributed their time and technical expertise to the development of this project. To all of them we extend our grateful acknowledgment.

**Rosemary T. Fruehling
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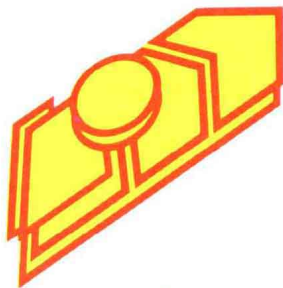
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part 1 An Overview of the Electronic Office



The business office is rapidly changing from a manual-based system to an electronic computer-based system. Automation of manual tasks is a concept that sums up this change. But the change is more than working faster with computers. The change is altering the relationship between office workers and managers.

Using sophisticated equipment in the electronic office, office workers will make decisions, analyze data, organize information, create graphics, and set up conferences.

Individuals who have well-rounded traditional office skills and who also can use the new technology will be in great demand. Office automation will not diminish the secretary's role but enhance it.

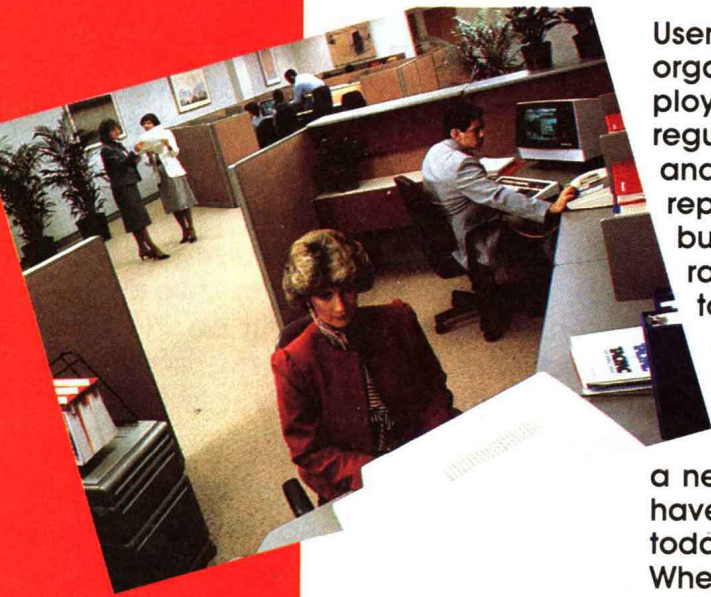
In the transition period, businesses will continue to use traditional equipment, such as the electric typewriter, the U.S. Postal Service, and telephones, along with computer systems. Obviously, there will always be a need for some traditional equipment, but electronic systems will increasingly dominate.

The chapters in Part 1 tell you how automation is affecting the basic office function of information processing and describe the electronic office of today. You will see why these are exciting times to start a business office career and why additional skills are important for advancement.

Automation notwithstanding, we will certainly never reach a "peopleless" office. In your work you will always deal with people. That being the case, Part 1 includes a discussion of human relations skills as well.

chapter 1

The Changing Office



We live in what is presently known as the Information Age. For the first time in history, more Americans are employed in jobs that involve processing information than are employed in jobs that produce goods. This makes it an exciting time to be in business because information is the lifeblood of the business world. Business organizations need information in order to function.

Users of business information include an organization's customers, clients, or employees; outside suppliers; government regulatory agencies; and other people and organizations. A corporation's annual report to its shareholders is an example of business information, and so is a memorandum from an administrative assistant to an executive regarding a vacation schedule. Every time a company makes a sale, purchases supplies, acquires new customers, expands its staff, introduces a product, or explores a new market, it generates information. We have more information at our disposal today than at any other time in history. Whenever scientists uncover facts, authors write books, creative thinkers come up with new theories, or inventors develop new devices, more information is generated.

In the 1970s computerization hit the American business office. Along with computers came an "information explosion" that has vastly increased the amount of information office workers have to deal with. Today more than 60 percent of all workers have occupations that are involved in the exchange of information. Compare this with the situation in 1950, when most people worked in manufacturing jobs and only 17 percent worked in offices, and you will see the impact of the "information explosion."

To cope with this explosion, businesses have to find more efficient ways to process information. Office workers find that they have to learn to operate new, complex machines, and they have to learn a whole

new vocabulary of technological terms. New information processing technology is also changing the way office workers perform their jobs. Computers now handle many of the repetitive, tedious tasks that used to take up so much time. This leaves more time for office workers and their managers to devote to responsibilities that require creativity, judgment, and the ability to make decisions.

In this chapter you will learn how Information Age technology is changing the very nature of office work. You will also learn some of the new computer-related terminology that you will need to know to progress through this course and to work in a modern business office. And you will learn about the changing role of office workers in the new Information Age.

What Is Information?

To define information, we must also define data. The terms *data* and *information* both mean *facts*. The difference is that **data** usually refers to a group of facts, usually in the form of words or figures—for example, a list of names and addresses or a sheet of sales figures. Often these facts are unorganized. **Information** refers to facts that have been processed or organized in some fashion. When you type a list of names and addresses in alphabetic order, or when you prepare a chart showing average monthly sales receipts, you are creating information. You are taking the data and organizing it into useful information, which can then be communicated to others.

An example that illustrates the difference between data and information is the U.S. census. Conducted every ten years, the census involves the collection of data: the number of people in each household and their ages, incomes, occupations, and so on. The data is then converted into information, such as the average household income in a particular city or a list of the fastest-growing cities. People can use such information to figure out future housing needs or to plan sales or marketing campaigns. Other examples of organized or processed facts are letters, inventories, reports, memos, expense accounts, schedules, and purchase orders.

High Tech in the Office

The need to find more efficient ways of handling the rapidly growing mountain of business information has been the driving force behind the development of office technology. When people talk about office technology or office automation, what they are really talking about is creating a workplace where sophisticated computers and other electronic equipment carry out as many of the office's routine jobs as possible. The basic reason for bringing electronic technology, or **high tech** as it is often called, into the office is to increase productivity. In a narrow sense, **increased productivity** means that more work can be done by employees in the same period of time or that employees can do the same amount of work in a shorter period of time. It can also mean that fewer employees can perform the same amount of work. In a broader sense, increased productivity can mean that workers have greater flexibility in accomplishing their tasks. Thus, the quality of their work can be improved, as well as the efficiency.

Until the 1980s the major application of technology to improve productivity was in the shop or factory, not the office. One reason for this is that the need for efficiency in the factory is greater than in the office. But another important factor is that in the shop and factory it is easier to find and identify those jobs which are repetitive and can be broken down into **algorithms**, that is, repetitive, step-by-step procedures that can more easily be computerized. Assembly-line jobs such as filling bottles with catsup and welding auto bodies are examples of factory jobs that lend themselves easily to

