

Administrative Procedures *in the* Electronic Office



Rosanne Bryce Sanders

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES IN THE ELECTRONIC OFFICE

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Preface

The role of the administrative assistant has expanded dramatically since the traditional office of the 1960s began its shift to electronics. Once known solely as *secretaries*, whatever the level and nature of their responsibilities, the secretaries of the 1960s came into their own as administrative assistants in the electronic office of the 1990s.

The title accurately reflects the role of persons who work in close conjunction with superiors in carrying out a myriad of administrative functions. Although the title varies somewhat across organizations, from executive assistant to administrative secretary or assistant, this text addresses all such persons as administrative assistants. Regardless of title, however, the same level of professionalism and expertise is implied.

Hopefully, all readers, whatever their titles, will find herein information that will enhance and promote their administrative careers in business. Such was the author's intent in writing the text.

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UNIT

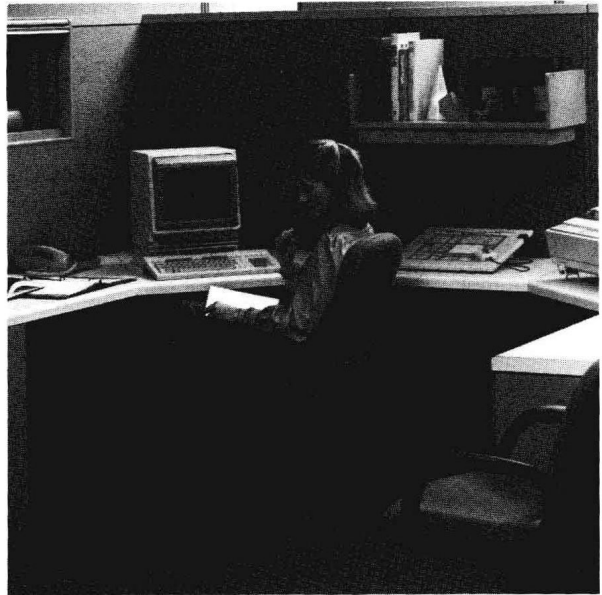
I

THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT IN THE ELECTRONIC OFFICE

**Chapter 1 Role of the Administrative Assistant
in a Changing Environment**

**Chapter 2 Equipment and Supplies
for the Electronic Office**

The administrative assistant of the 1990s demonstrates a remarkable ability to adapt to the electronic technology impacting so powerfully on business operations. Assuming more complex responsibilities, the role of an administrative aide expands as new technologies are integrated into long-standing traditional procedures.



1 Role of the Administrative Assistant in a Changing Environment

INTRODUCTION

The administrative assistant of the 1990s enjoys a unique distinction as one who blends the traditional procedures of the pre-electronic office with the technological innovations of the 1990s. The electronic "intrusion" into a smoothly functioning office is welcomed not only because it represents progress, but because the electronic procedures have reduced the monotony of repetitive work, providing time for more challenging pursuits.

The role of administrative assistant has been expanded to include major responsibilities related to supervision, management, and decision-making. Consequently, as a result of electronics, the role has become more diversified, more challenging, and more rewarding.

Terms and acronyms in this chapter include:

ergonomics	masking systems
facsimile	electronic mail
CBMS	task lighting
work stations	landscaped office

ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

The administrative assistant plays a key role in helping the organization achieve a smooth transition from the manual processes of the immediate past to today's electronic procedures. Careful blending of conventional with electronic procedures merges both into an efficient support system for an employer. The company benefits in two ways: (1) state-of-the-art electronics are applied to those functions where speed and accuracy are critical, and (2) time-tested procedures which cannot be computerized are carried out with the administrative assistant's usual skill and efficiency.

Together, electronic and conventional procedures meld into an effective information system where productivity and employee morale are accorded equal emphasis.

Management Perceptions of Administrative Assistants

Administrative assistants and executive secretaries are coming into their own in many offices, accepting major managerial responsibilities delegated to them by their superiors. In some instances, the executives rely on the insights of their administrative assistants when weighing the alternatives of important decisions. Nor is it uncommon for management to encourage their administrative assistants to attend seminars on time management, assertiveness training, supervision, and similar topics, underwriting all costs for them to do so.

These and similar evidences of special accord attest to management's increased respect for their capable assistants. Growing numbers acknowledge that their own success is due in large measure to the able assistance and loyal support of their administrative assistants. Granting their assistants more authority and responsibility is one way of acknowledging their contributions to the company.

Self-Perceptions of Administrative Assistants

The self-image of administrative assistants is enhanced by their employers' recognition and trust. Taking pride in their work and in the contributions made to the company, they are motivated to stretch their professional talents and seek career advancement through professional growth. The following are typical of the avenues taken to pursue that goal:

- evening courses at local colleges or universities, often with the goal of an academic degree as the ultimate objective
- membership in professional organizations dedicated to special professional interests
- leadership roles in professional organizations
- special workshops and seminars designed to build self-confidence and/or "people" skills
- certification as professionals in special fields of interest such as data processing specialist, paralegal aide, certified professional secretary, and so on



Figure 1-1 Curved panels, an open staircase, a fully windowed wall, and potted plants add style to this functional work station. *Courtesy of Steelcase, Inc.*

According to their own descriptions, administrative assistants during the course of a typical workday or period of time will

- compose memos, letters, and reports, not only for their principals' signatures, but on their own initiative and for their own signatures
- participate in mutual goal setting with their principals on a regular basis
- have a voice in determining ways to increase efficiency and productivity in the office
- attend seminars, workshops, and other forms of continuing education
- work toward achieving higher-education degrees when feasible

The Impact of Office Automation

Although electronic systems have imposed fundamental changes in the way information is processed, administrative assistants have adjusted well to the changes imposed on them. In most instances, their work has become more interesting, more challenging, and less tedious, thanks to the shift to electronic processes.

For instance, the shift from typewriters to word processors has brought about dramatic improvements in the way keyboarding errors are corrected,

documents are altered, and multiple copies are made. The tedium of endless re-typing to correct errors or to rearrange paragraphs is in the past. So is the inconvenience of dealing with carbon packs and carbon-smudged fingers.

Administrative assistants appreciate the help offered by computer systems and plan for the installation of a full complement of electronic equipment at their work stations. The fully integrated electronic office reduces the boredom of repetitive keyboarding, adds variety and interest to the work, provides time for more challenging and more responsible activities, enables administrative assistants to contribute substantive input to executive-level sessions, and increases productivity.

The Electronic Office: Components and Applications

The extent of electronic equipment in the office varies widely from one business to another, with company requirements and management attitudes accounting for most of the variance. The following electronic applications, however, are the ones most commonly used in the typical business office.

1. Electronic mail, in any of several forms
2. Advanced telecommunication networks
3. Electronic filing and image processing
4. Word processing and desktop publishing
5. Teleconferencing to supplant or enhance face-to-face meetings
6. Local area networks (LANs) cabling the components together into a total communication system

Each of these components is summarized briefly in this chapter, providing a cursory view of the office environment in which the administrative assistant operates. An in-depth exploration of each component is reserved for later chapters.

Electronic Mail One of the most widely used components of the electronic office, *electronic mail* is a generic term which encompasses at least five popular formats:

TWX and Telex, networks which span the globe, used primarily for brief messages and internal mail, that is, between the main office and branches.

Facsimile machines, a type of long-distance photocopying of documents and images. Merged with computers, FAX machines transmit images directly from the computer screen.

CBMS (computer-based message systems), transmitting and receiving messages from screen to screen of the users' computers.

Communicating word processors, which enable word processors to act as message transceivers as well as text editors.

Voice mail which stores and forwards messages via telephone lines.

Advanced Telecommunication Networks Advanced PBX technology gives users access to more and better telephone service without operator intervention or assistance. Upgraded with microprocessor units, the networks accept digital data as well as voice communications.

Electronic Filing and Image Processing Electronic filing can be described as the electronic alternative to the paper storage of records. It takes many forms, including:

Database management systems which store records magnetically on disks or tape. Once stored, records can be called up on command, altered, deleted, rearranged, or reproduced in hard copy by the user.

Micrographics, the process of storing and preserving records on film, then retrieving them electronically if a computer-assisted retrieval (CAR) system is in place.

Image processing which uses laser beams to scan documents and transfer the images to optical disks. The enormous storage capacity of the disks makes them especially attractive for library archives and encyclopedic storage.

Word Processing and Desktop Publishing Word processing remains the cornerstone of office automation as it is known today. With the addition of desktop publishing features, word processing programs prepare camera-ready copy for publication, including graphic images, columnar type, and various sizes and styles of type fonts.

Figure 1-2 Many administrative assistants enjoy the luxury of designer work settings. In this office, function and style are combined through a blend of traditional architecture with modular furnishings. Courtesy of Steelcase, Inc.

