



## Office of the Future: 2020

### Research Identifies Future Workplace Trends and Skills Necessary for Success

The future office will be increasingly mobile, with technology enabling employees to perform their jobs from virtually anywhere, according to *Office of the Future: 2020*, a research study recently released by OfficeTeam. But greater control over where and how people work won't necessarily translate into more free time. Forty-two percent of executives polled said they believe employees will be working more hours in the next 10 to 15 years.

OfficeTeam, a leading staffing service specializing in highly skilled administrative professionals, created Office of the Future: 2020 as a follow-up to its previous research project, *Office of the Future: 2005*, released in 1999. Trends identified then are a reality today, including the use of multifunctional, wireless technology to conduct business from various locales. Administrative professionals also are now playing a greater role in activities such as Internet research, desktop publishing, computer training and support, and website maintenance.

With *Office of the Future: 2020*, OfficeTeam examines trends that may impact the workplace in the next 10 to 15 years. In addition to interviews with workplace and technology experts, futurists, and trend watchers, OfficeTeam surveyed workers and executives at the nation's 1,000 largest companies.

"Technology will continue to reshape the workplace, changing how and where we conduct business," said Diane Domeyer, executive director of OfficeTeam. "As a result, flexibility and adaptability will be sought-after attributes in employees at all levels."

Among the findings:

- Technology tools to provide even greater flexibility — Miniature wireless devices, WiFi, WiMax and mobile technology will continue to allow a company's staff to work outside of the office with greater ease. Additionally, virtual environments and web-based conferencing services will provide off-site employees with real-time access to meetings, reducing the need to travel.
- Telecommuting to rise — Improved wireless connectivity will allow for an increasingly flexible workforce. Eighty-seven percent of executives surveyed believe telecommuting will increase in the next 10 to 15 years. Telecommuting enables employees to work where it's most convenient, but it also challenges their interpersonal skills. They must build relationships with coworkers while having fewer in-person interactions.
- Staff to put in more time — Forty-two percent of executives surveyed by OfficeTeam think employees will be working more hours in 10 to 15 years. Only 9 percent said they would be working fewer hours.
- Workers will stay in touch while on vacation — With the proliferation of wireless technology, staff will be expected to remain in close contact with the office while they're away. Eighty-six percent of executives surveyed said workers will be more connected to the office while on vacation in the future.
- Companies/employees take a new view on work/life balance — People may put in more time, but they will do so using tools that provide more control over their schedules and enable them to better balance priorities. There will be an increasingly blurred line between work and other activities; people will need to multitask to meet all of their obligations efficiently.

After concluding research and pinpointing future workplace trends, OfficeTeam and industry experts identified six skills professionals will need to prepare for success in this new environment. The skills form the acronym ACTION. They are:

**Analysis:** Analyzing information and exercising good judgment

**Collaboration:** Establishing rapport and facilitating team building

**Technical aptitude:** Selecting the best technical tools and using them effectively

**Intuition:** Identifying and adapting to the needs and work styles of others

**Ongoing education:** Engaging in continual learning

**Negotiation:** Participating in business discussions that produce positive results

"In the future office, there will be added pressure to adapt quickly to change, work smarter, increase productivity and perform duties outside of one's job description," said Domeyer. "The good news is that emerging technological tools and educational opportunities will better enable professionals to meet these challenges."

Some additional information from the OfficeTeam project relating to administrative professionals...

### **New Administrative Roles**

With the transformation of the workplace, the role of administrative professionals will continue to evolve. Following a trajectory that began within the last 20 years as secretaries turned into administrative professionals, careers within this field will become increasingly complex and specialized. Many positions will require sophisticated skill sets and experience in specific areas such as technology, human resources and business processes. Here are several key trends that administrative professionals can expect:

- **Entrepreneurial approach** — Administrative professionals will take an increasingly entrepreneurial approach to their jobs and careers. Those most successful will possess knowledge of business management principles, technical aptitude, sophisticated interpersonal skills (or "emotional intelligence") and an almost intuitive understanding of the needs of an organization. As more functions become automated, the importance of using interpersonal skills to anticipate needs, respond to concerns and provide a "human touch" that computers lack will be paramount.
- **New skill sets and responsibilities** — To advance their careers, administrative professionals will pursue business-focused training that emphasizes negotiation, delegation, budgeting, supervision and planning skills. Other useful knowledge areas include library science, for organizing and storing text and data used by groups; desktop publishing, for the creation of newsletters, presentation materials and other corporate documents; and electronic communications, an emerging field concerned with ensuring the security and integrity of electronically transmitted information.
- **Specialized roles** — The administrative professional will be a specialist rather than a generalist, with job descriptions focusing on the technical and managerial aspects of day-to-day business operations.
- **Demonstrated experience** — Administrative professionals will need to demonstrate to potential employers concrete evidence of specialized skills and abilities, such as technical expertise and industry experience.

The future office will be increasingly mobile and flexible as companies swiftly assemble the resources necessary to meet changing business needs. Core teams will manage employees working from diverse locations — from home offices to temporary business spaces to cafés. A premium will be placed on staff members who possess a combination of technical and interpersonal skills, and can adapt quickly to change. Professionals who are able to create new products and services and identify more efficient ways to work will be among the most marketable as innovation continues to drive business. Following are key findings indicating how the workplace is expected to evolve in the coming years:

- **Emerging technologies** will allow a company's staff to work off-site with greater ease. Geographic location will matter less as businesses shift human and material resources around the globe in response to market opportunities.
- **Increasingly**, companies will depend on temporary, instant "plug and play" offices that can be established wherever needed — in commercial spaces that are fully wired and readily adaptable to the needs of business tenants, for example.
- **The concept of going to work** will be redefined as employees use portable, wireless tools to communicate from any location. For business, investment in technology will be offset by substantial savings on traditional overhead expenses such as leases, property taxes and facilities maintenance.
- **Ubiquitous wireless connectivity** will permit people to easily collaborate with their colleagues. Advanced electronic communication devices will eliminate traditional time, distance and language barriers, facilitating communication and preventing lags in production.
- **A greater number of people** will telecommute to work. In fact, 87 percent of executives polled by OfficeTeam predict there will be increased telecommuting in the coming decade.
- **While technology** will make employees more flexible, it doesn't appear people will work fewer hours. Forty-two percent

of executives surveyed by OfficeTeam said they believe employees will put in more time at the office during the next 10 to 15 years; only 9 percent anticipated spending fewer hours on the job. Likewise, 86 percent of respondents said employees will be expected to stay more connected with the office while on vacation.

- The concept of "emotional intelligence" will grow in prominence. This phrase refers to those skills and abilities that enable people to interact well with those around them, respond to others' needs and priorities, and adapt to a rapidly changing business environment.
- Key skills — The most important skills and abilities for administrative professionals can be summed up with the acronym ACTION. This stands for Analysis, Collaboration, Technical aptitude, Intuition, Ongoing education, and Negotiation.

### **New Administrative Roles**

Given the multifaceted roles administrative professionals will play in the next decade, the current designation, "administrative assistant," may not be sufficient to convey the scope and depth of their skills and expertise. As a result, new titles that reflect greater specialization will emerge. By 2020, administrative personnel will likely fulfill many of the functions identified below:

- Resource Coordinator — Virtual offices that employ numerous contract workers will rely heavily on individuals adept at bringing together the right human resources for a given project — much like movie producers assembling a cast, camera crew and production team.
- Workflow Controller — This individual will serve as "mission control" for an organization. Whereas the resource coordinator will assemble project teams, the workflow controller will ensure these professionals have the support and resources required to do their jobs. This position also will facilitate interaction among teams and coordinate the transfer and use of company resources such as computers, communications equipment and other technological tools. In smaller organizations, the same person may perform workflow control and resource coordination.
- Knowledge Manager — In the more fluid and project-based office of the future, this central figure will serve as a repository of institutional information, history and best practices. The knowledge manager will ensure continuity and consistency, and help new employees and project professionals adapt to the organization's culture. In addition, the knowledge manager will perform a function similar to that of a librarian, assisting people in locating the documents or data necessary to perform their jobs.
- Telecommuting Liaison — As the number of off-site workers increases, companies will designate a telecommuter liaison to connect remote workers with each other and management. In some instances, individuals in this position will work with senior management to develop telecommuting policies, including helping to determine which positions are suited for off-site work. Day-to-day responsibilities will include managing telecommuting schedules and providing technical support and updates to telecommuters regarding changes in operational procedures and company policies.
- Virtual-Meetings Organizer — This person will help employees schedule conferences and set up the necessary equipment. The virtual-meetings organizer will be technically proficient and trained in the use of cameras, projection systems, electronic whiteboards, meeting software, audio equipment and related tools.

Visit [www.officeofthefuture2020.com](http://www.officeofthefuture2020.com) to find additional research findings, survey charts and video clips, and to test your ACTION skills.

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