



# FAKULTAS

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UNTUK EDARAN DALAMAN

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Maklumat (IT) dalam Pendidikan Sekolah Bestari

*Raja Abdullah Yaacob & Saidina Omar Samsuri*

Hakcipta Intelektual Era Digital Menurut Islam

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Kumpulan Pendesak/Seminat

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Evaluation of the Construction Industry in International Markets

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Mendengar dan Menggalakkan Manusia Bercakap

*Darussalam Abu Bakar*

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## **SENARAI PENYUMBANG**

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1. Tuan Haji A. Aziz Deraman  
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2. Profesor Madya Dr Raja Abdullah Yaacob  
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Fakulti Pengajian Maklumat UiTM
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# **THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE SECRETARIAL PROFESSION**

*Halifah Abdul Rahman*

In as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century or even earlier, secretarial job titles frequently included “personal” or “private”. Men continued to dominate the secretarial field until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. After the invention of the writing machine, many women entered the office workforce for various clerical roles. Women came to the rescue during the industrial period at the turn of the century, where business offices faced a paperwork crisis. Women adapted well to new technologies such as the adding and calculating machines, telephones, and typewriters. Many women held positions as secretaries. The demand for secretaries was so great it could not meet the supply. By this time women dominated the office workforce.

In 1942 a group of secretaries in America became the nucleus to develop an organization that would help to professionalize this occupation. It was known as the National Secretaries Association (NSA), now known as the International Association of Administrative Professionals. NSA first administered the Certified Professional Secretaries Examination, a standard of excellence for the profession in 1951.<sup>1</sup>

For a long time the word “secretary” was stereotyped to mean a “person who types correspondence” or one who takes dictation. To better describe the administrative and information management functions of today’s office support staff, the term administrative professional” is recommended as

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<sup>1</sup> International Association Of Administrative Professionals. “History of the Secretarial Profession”. [www.iaap-hq.org](http://www.iaap-hq.org). Feb. 2000.

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an alternative to the “secretary”. This title is recommended by the leadership of Professional Secretaries International®- The Association for Office Professionals™. This Association described the secretary then as an:

*“Individuals who possess a mastery of office skills, demonstrate the ability to assume responsibilities without direct supervision, exercise initiative and judgement, and make decisions within the scope of assigned authority.”<sup>2</sup>*

Today’s secretaries do not resemble the secretaries mentioned earlier, where they basically did administrative duties such as typing, filing, answering telephone calls, and making photocopies. Secretaries are highly responsible for the administrative functions as well as many responsibilities previously restricted to managers such as hiring and supervising junior staff, making decisions in their own scope, making purchases, managing projects and of course are proficient in the demands of the constantly-changing technology. Secretaries today are also known as administrative assistants, office coordinators, executive assistants, office managers and many other names created by various organizations depending on the nature of the job.

Traditionally, the administrative office management functions were limited. However, with the passage of time came an accompanying increase in job expectancy, a larger and more culturally diverse workforce, a global economy, and the development of new information technologies. All of these factors brought about the Information Revolution, an increased demand for more information in order to make

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<sup>2</sup> ibid.

intelligent decisions at greatly accelerated rates.<sup>3</sup> Management began to create a well-designed work system and placed more reliance upon office personnel. Due to the variety of names used by different organizations, the name “secretaries” is no longer appropriate in some organizations and has been changed to “*administrative professionals*”.

In August 1998, PSI (now known as IAAP) delegates at the PSI International Convention and Education Forum in Atlanta, Georgia approved a bylaws amendment changing the association’s name to International Association of Administrative Professionals. The Secretaries Week has been officially renamed *Administrative Professionals Week*, and Professional Secretaries Day will become *Administrative Professionals Day*, effective of April 23-29, 2000.<sup>4</sup>

The profession has drastically changed due to technological innovations, but IAAP still defines the *administrative professional* as it was defined for a secretary since the actual nature still remains in most areas.

As business grows to meet the challenges of the global economy, *administrative professionals* are aware of their role in representing their respective companies. Secretaries no longer just type correspondence, take dictation and transcribe them, or just make coffee and sit on their boss’ lap. Gone are all the days as the expectations are greater and more demanding today. Their roles depend highly on the demands of the respective bosses. Generally, most *administrative professionals* today are expected to be highly skilful in

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<sup>3</sup> Keeling and Kallaus 1996. “Managing Offices in the Global Economy” dlm. *Administrative Office Management* 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Hlm. 3.

<sup>4</sup> International Association Of Administrative Professional. “Professional Secretaries Week Renamed Administrative Professionals Week”. [www.iaap-hq.org](http://www.iaap-hq.org). Feb 2000.

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computer applications, interpersonal and communication skills, organizational skills, time management and an acceptable attitude towards self, others and work.

**Computer Skills:** From these dimensions mentioned above, their role can be further expanded. *Administrative professionals* play a vital role in processing and distributing information. Besides disseminating information they are expected to do research and interpret information using computers and other advanced office technologies and to perform “information management” functions in the automated/computerized office. *Administrative professionals* are experts in new and emerging technology which includes the Internet, Intranets, e-mail, and on-line services.

Skills on a variety of PC software applications are no exception to the *administrative professionals*. They are expected to manage and access databases, process words, organize data/figures on the spreadsheets, produce literature attractively using desktop publishing, create presentation graphics or use multi-media for business presentations, managing and designing websites, scheduling appointments, meetings, conferences, and travel arrangements worldwide. Definitely those businesses dealing with products or services would expect their *administrative professionals* to be able to use the e-mail extensively, do e-marketing, e-commerce, data/warehousing mining and get information using various search engines instantaneously. They are expected, in some cases, to administer computer networks, upgrade and recommend office software, and training new staff in computer application software.

They are also seen as the final formatters to make a document look professional and readable. They are the primary applications users and therefore train their managers, at times.

They are also troubleshooters for computer hardware and software problems and the first person managers “in trouble” call for help.<sup>5</sup> The knowledge on technology can be borderless, the more the administrative professionals know, the more valuable they are to the companies. Companies are now “paying for results” and not “what you know”, it’s more of “what you produce.” Skills must be related to job objectives.<sup>6</sup>

***Interpersonal Skills:*** Though the *administrative professionals* are expected to show a high competency in the technical skills, the **human touch** is still very much in demand. *Administrative professionals* are required to interact and work well with all levels of internal management and staff and participate in cross-functional teams with executives and technical professionals as well. They should participate and contribute pleasantly as a member of a team. They are called for flexibility, meaning they are able to shift gears and go with the flow, if things get hectic. They strive to serve customers and clients’ satisfaction, and are able to persuade as well as convince them. They work with diversity- work well with men and women from diverse backgrounds.

***Communication Skills:*** This is a basic skill used everyday by almost everyone yet the most abused and misused skill. The basics in communication are a must, as *administrative professionals* are no longer expected to just take dictation and transcribe them verbatim. Communication skills include reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Today they are expected to speed-read information. As information is retrieved from various sources they are required to

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<sup>5</sup> International Association Of Administrative Professionals. “Administrative Trends”. [www.iaap-hq.org](http://www.iaap-hq.org). Sept. 1999.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* Feb. 2000.

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understand, interpret and determine the main idea or essential message, identify relevant details, facts, infer the meaning of unknown or technical vocabulary to be presented or used as research materials.

In fact when processing documents they are required to draft, compose, write, correct, read, proofread, and present the documents such as letters, manuals, reports, proposals, graphs, and flow charts. In drafting and presenting these documents they are expected to use appropriate emphasis, form, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Definitely this calls for sharpening the writing skills. They are also required to communicate thoughts and ideas, and to record information completely and accurately.

Nevertheless, **listening skills**, in my opinion, can be considered the most vital skill in communication for this profession. They need to receive, interpret, and respond to verbal messages and other cues such as body language especially when dealing with others. Their own gestures and body language need to be taken care too. Another important aspect is that instructions pop up from every angle and corner at the least expected moments, thereafter needing their attention and action. They just cannot keep their ears opened, rather they need to register instructions given either in their notebooks or the “minds’ computer”.

Communication does not mean just talking face to face. Today they are expected to communicate on the telephone, voice mail and information transmitting devices and deal with the ever changing and complicating information received or sent. The moment *administrative professionals* make grammatical errors in their speech, it would immediately reflect their image as well as that of the company they represent. Speech involves the pronunciation, grammar,

sentence structure and voice. Language is just another skill like the computer skill that one has to keep in touch everyday. Of course the more languages the *administrative professionals* are able to master the better it would be for them.

***Organizational and Time Management Skills:*** This is the most demanded skill in today's job advertisements after computer skills. The *administrative professional* is said to be processing information; besides that, there is a need in organizing and planning time, selecting goal-relevant activities, prioritizing or ranking them, allocating time to prepare and follow schedules. They need to manage projects, and to coordinate functions or events.

***Acceptable Attitude:*** Acceptable attitude towards self, others and work will be a missing trait if it is not included in today's *administrative professionals'* job. Absolutely, a positive attitude towards all three aspects is sought after. People have to feel good about themselves and that feeling spreads outward, affecting everyone around them. They should love and be proud of what they are doing. They should have pride in their jobs. They should be loyal to their employers, adhere to company policies and strive to achieve their career goals as well as company goals.

Physical characteristics are obvious traits that are naturally displayed, yet need to be checked especially when caught in an awkward situation. Their mental characteristics have to be balanced and in control. The *administrative professionals* are expected to trigger enthusiasm so as to enhance creativity and to cause a better and charming working atmosphere. Certainly, stress or overwork can steal their positive attitude. They need to continuously renew and restore or refresh their views, rejuvenate their approach, re-establish their positive

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focus and repair the damage of wear and tear towards their attitudes.

**Other Skills:** There are other essential skills that are needed today by most organizations such as computational, accounting and negotiation skills. The fact that *administrative professionals* are no longer needed since most employers are doing their own documentation, handling calls and travel arrangements, is a myth. They are still widely needed and their role is significant in the growth and success of their organizations; and the growth for administrative profession is increasing yearly.

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