



Administrative Services, Employment Services & Other Administrative Services 2020

Industry Developments and Workforce Issues

Employment Overview.^{1,2} The Administrative and Support Services is a diverse sector that includes a wide range of occupations across many industries. A career pathway in this sector can span from an entry-role to higher level occupations in governance and corporate strategy. Typical titles include Office Administrator; Contracts Manager; Project Administrator; Practice Manager; Administrative Assistant, HR Officer, Call Centre Worker and Personal Assistant. Employees in this sector work in large, medium or small organisations.

The national labour market outlook³ estimates an employment growth of 8.3% for Employment Services and 9.6% for Other Administrative Services over the five years to 2024. Most recent ABS figures⁴ indicate that as at May 2020, both sectors jointly employed 184,500 people nationally. Western Australia employed 9,100 people and while numbers have fluctuated over the past year, this represents a decline in the previous two quarters: 13,000 in the February quarter, 18,900 in the November quarter and 15,700 in the August quarter. Compared to May 2019 (18,800), current numbers represent a decrease of 51%.

Economic Conditions. The average weekly pay for the occupation of general clerk is \$1,073, human resource professional is \$1,662, office manager is \$1,490, call centre worker is \$1,196, project administrator is \$1,660, practice manager is \$1,600 and personal assistant is \$1,432. Future growth is anticipated for human resource professional and office manager and personal assistant is on the decline.⁵

Augmentation of Role. Administrative roles are constantly evolving as the corporate world changes. Today's office manager must think and act like an income generator, be aligned with the management team, yet be approachable to hear the ideas and suggestions of colleagues. Gathering information, creating solutions, presenting and implementing action plans are skills that an office manager must be able to demonstrate. For small to medium size businesses that are not large enough to have separate human resource (HR), information technology and contracting departments, these responsibilities will form part of an Office Manager's role. Common duties associated with many of the administrative roles include payroll, accounting, social media marketing, customer service, document control, HR, work health and safety, personal assistant duties and event organisation. Roles within smaller businesses typically include a multitude of tasks and, in comparison, roles within larger organisations tend to be more discrete with specific specialisation.

Safe Workplaces Post Pandemic. As the pandemic lockdown restrictions are slowly being lifted, workers are gradually returning to the office. Businesses still need to comply with a host of guidelines designed to create safe workplaces for workers.

¹ Industry advice provided to the Financial, Administrative and Professional Services Training Council, 2020.

² These figures do not take into account any impact caused by COVID-19. It reflects data collected prior to the effects of the pandemic which is having a substantial negative impact on the current labour market.

³ Australian Government, Department of Jobs and Small Business, Labour Market Information Portal, [Employment Projections, 2019 Industry Projections – five years to May 2024](#), May 2019.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Australia Detailed Quarterly, [Data Cube EQ06 Employed persons by industry group of main job \(ANZSIC\), Sex, State and Territory](#), February 2020.

⁵ Australian Government Job Outlook <https://joboutlook.gov.au/Career>



A report from National Geographic⁶ describes how the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating workers' worries about returning to jobs in open planned offices. Companies have started to think about how they might change their corporate workspaces, with some experts saying the open floor plan could be redone with better consideration for personal space and stricter cleaning schedules.

Strategies⁷ being introduced by businesses post COVID include:

- Scheduling rotating shifts for employees returning to the office to maintain social-distancing policies and to avoid full office occupancy;
- Staggering start and finish times so not to overwhelm the public transport system and avoid overcrowding in the office lift;
- Adding barriers or panels between desks especially for open plan offices;
- Ensuring common spaces in the office is cleaned regularly such as escalator handrails, door handles, buttons in lifts etc, and
- Enforcing *Clean in – Clean Out* policy for hot desking

Increasing Focus on Compliance. Administration roles and other specialist roles such as HR are increasing required to focus on compliance issues. There are numerous laws and regulations governing the employment relationship and additional more specific regulations were introduced for the pandemic, that Office and HR Managers must understand and navigate in order to help ensure their organisations avoid costly fines and penalties and potential harm to reputation.

An example is the underpayment of staff. The complexity of the Australian industrial relationship system and ineffective governance by companies has seen an increase in cases of non-compliance. These included large companies such as Commonwealth Bank and Woolworths.⁸

Changing Attitudes Towards Offices. Before the pandemic, the conventional thinking had been that offices were critical to productivity, culture and where work was done. Social distancing rules have forced millions of employees to work from home and many have found that they have enjoyed working from home and surprisingly some found that they were more productive. Many employees liberated from long commutes and travel have found more productive ways to spend that time and enjoyed greater flexibility in balancing their personal and professional lives. Many businesses think they can access new pools of talent with fewer locational constraints, adopt innovative processes to boost productivity, create an even stronger culture and significantly reduce real estate costs. Even after reopening, attitudes toward offices will probably continue to evolve.⁹

Industry Workforce Priorities

Importance of Soft Skills. Soft skills are the key to success especially in an increasingly automated world. Social and emotional skills are becoming more crucial as intelligent machines take over more physical, repetitive and basic cognitive tasks. HR recruiters have difficulties finding candidates with soft skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, innovation and creativity and the ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity.

The importance of soft skills is highlighted in a Hay's report on Executive Assistants (EA). Those who rise to the top of their field are hardworking, organised, collaborative and efficient, with a suite of strong technical skills. Top EAs in senior positions can attract salaries up to \$120,000 reflecting the integral part they can play in a company's success. After surveying over 500 EAs, Hay's report found that 72%

⁶ National Geographic, *Goodbye to open office spaces? How experts are rethinking the workplace*, April 2020.

⁷ Herald Sun, *How coronavirus could change the future of hot desking*, 11 May 2020

⁸ SBS, *Underpaid Staff in 2019*, 5 November 2019

⁹ Sydney Morning Herald, *'I feel so much better': Employees ready to work from home more often*, 1 June 2020.



said organisational skills were among the top skills needed and 42% said prioritising was in the top 3 skills. Time management is hence one of the biggest challenges in an EAs role.¹⁰

Industry Specific Experience.¹¹ There is an increase in demand for Administrators with industry specific experience. For example, a real estate company will want to employ Administrators with a property administration background, Mobilisation Administrators with mining industry experience and Contract Administrators with construction or property experience. The combination of technical skills, soft skills and industry experience are not too common and can be difficult to recruit.

Leadership Skills. In these uncertain and highly stressful times, there is heightened reliance on managers to maintain the well-being, health and safety of their workforce which requires leadership skills. Managers need to act swiftly to safeguard employees and migrate to a new way of working that even the most extreme business-continuity plans had not envisioned.

The four qualities identified by McKinsey as critical for business leaders to care for people in crisis and to ensure business recovery are awareness, vulnerability, empathy and compassion.¹²

Digital Skills in Demand. Digital skills are not only required for high-skilled jobs; they are now required across the full span of the workforce, ranging from entry-level call centre workers to sophisticated information technology roles. The need for digital skills has in the past been associated with professional roles, however, digital skills are now commonly required across a broad range of roles. For example, Microsoft Excel is often associated with consultants and finance roles, but these skills are also essential to administrative and HR assistants. Blue-collar roles also require digital skills with forklift drivers and warehouse workers often needing to know how to use inventory management systems such as SAP. A report from Australian Industry and Skills Committee has found that *technology use and applications (which aligns with digital skills) received an average ranking of 4th (out of 12) across all skills forecasts.*¹³

The coronavirus pandemic has brought a new sense of purpose to workplace software like video conferencing and chat applications, such as Zoom and Slack. These types of software can help employees collaborate on work previously done in person, and it became a business necessity during the lockdown. As an unintended consequence of this forced rapid adoption, many workers have improved their digital skills who are likely to continue using this software when offices open back up.¹⁴

Emergence of Micro-Credentials. Micro credentials are certification-style qualifications that individuals choose to study to improve a skill found in a particular industry area. They are short, low-cost online courses that can formalise both hard and soft skills. This new learning concept continues to gain recognition and is highly sought after within the professional landscape.

The shift towards micro-credentials continues in preference of full qualifications for skill upgrades. Those who are currently in the workforce can use the micro-credential style of learning to tighten the skills gap to ensure their professional growth remains continuous by keeping up to date with relevant and emerging practices.¹⁵

Some universities are already using micro-credentialing to maintain the currency of their offerings by certifying smaller attainments of learning. These units can be stacked to meet the student's needs which can lead to the attainment of a full degree.

With universities facing massive job losses and economic catastrophe as a result of the pandemic, many more universities are adapting to new ways of doing business and building market share with micro to short courses.¹⁶

Re-evaluation of Offshoring Capabilities.¹⁷ Disruptions stemming from Covid-19 have caused businesses to re-evaluate their reliance on offshoring capabilities as it leaves them particularly

¹⁰ Hays Industry Insight, [What It Takes to be an EA](#)

¹¹ Hays Jobs Report January to June 2020, [Hays Office Support](#)

¹² McKinsey, [Cultivating Compassionate Leadership in a Crisis](#), 2020

¹³ Australian Industry Skills and Committee, [National Overview: Digital Skills](#), Updated 15 April 2020

¹⁴ Vox, [Office work will never be the same](#), 21 May 2020

¹⁵ Campus Morning Mail, [Going big on micro-credentials](#), 29 April 2020

¹⁶ University World News, [Universities face disastrous fall in income due to COVID-19](#), 22 April 2020

¹⁷ Financial Times, [Coronavirus shortages prompt Australia to bring manufacturing home](#)



vulnerable. This became very apparent when call centres for the airline, superannuation and banking industries were overwhelmed with calls during the pandemic. Many Australian businesses lost capacity in their offshore centres in Indian and the Philippines when COVID lockdowns took effect. One particular business, Telstra, is set to permanently change the way it provides customer service post-COVID, with an aim to route all inbound voice calls through Australian call centres by 2022. With the suspension of some of the activity handled offshore, Telstra had to recruit at least 1000 new agents in Australia to cover the shortfall. The longer-term strategy is to try to route more customer service enquiries through digital channels and apps.¹⁸

¹⁸ IT News, [Telstra to have Australian agents answer all inbound calls from 2022](#), 9 July 2020