



WORLD ADMINISTRATORS

SUMMIT

Paper

*Identity & Image of Administrative
Professionals*

A global guideline for enhancing the Profession



10th WA-Summit, Frankfurt 2018 – Flags of 22 Delegate Countries attending

**Paper Prepared to meet Outcome from:
10th World Administrators Summit, Frankfurt 2018**

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Introduction

During the 10th WA-Summit in Frankfurt, October 2018, the “Identity and Image of our Profession” was one of the topics for discussion on the Agenda. This paper is intended to be used as a basis for education and training for new and/or existing administrative professionals and as a marketing tool to seek dialogue in the working environment.

The **content** of this paper is an explanation of how the outcomes of the discussions, of administrative professionals from all over the world, were reached. Special thanks for their guidance and notetaking of our discussions are due to; Karen Nanninga our Facilitator, Julie Perrine our Task Force Advisor, and Nora Onishi our Notetaker.

At the 10th World Administrators Summit (WA-Summit) 2018¹, the following outcome was developed:

Outcomes on the Image of our Profession:

1. A Task Force was developed to undertake the following two recommendations including Eleni Rizikianou (Greece), Karin Helene (Sweden), Vania Alessi (Italy)
2. The Task Force in consultation with the WASummit Advisory Council to develop a white paper for administrative professionals to provides a global guideline for enhancing the identity and image of administrative professionals by the end of 2019 (Eleni Rizikianou).
3. The WASummit Advisory Council to promote this paper as a basis for education and training for new and/or existing administrative/office professionals and as a tool to seek dialogue in the working environment.
4. Create three templates for ‘managing yourself’ by the end of 2019 (Karin Helene and Vania Alessi):
 - Template for personal development and creating a personal portfolio
 - Template with ideas, actions, and processes for self-assessment, including an overview of tools
 - Template for performance appraisal with your manager, short term and long term

ACCEPTED

The **procedure** followed in the 2018 discussion group to reach the agreed outcome was:

1. to discuss the meta-view of the topic: “Identity and Image of our Profession - How can we enhance these?” by asking questions
2. to lead towards the development of the tools an administrative professional requires to cultivate and build her own personal, professional and business identity.

¹ 2018 WA-Summit [Outcomes](#) document

The **brainstorming** session in the 2018 discussion group led to a request to develop tools and outline actions for the administrative professional, professional communities, and associations.

Leading questions developed by the 2018 discussion group were:

- What can the individual administrative professional do to support, stimulate, and promote her/his **PERSONAL** identity and image?
- What can the individual administrative professional do to support, stimulate, and promote the identity and image of the **ROLE**?
- What can the individual administrative professional and professional associations do to support, stimulate, and promote the identity and image of the **PROFESSION**?

The **conclusion** was that the basis for this enhancement is:

1. awareness of one's personal professionalism
2. clarity on the (desired) role
3. accountability for one's individual performance.

Both internal and external perceptions need to be balanced to achieve sustainable recognition in one's professional environment. The basis for this is empowerment of self-worth/self-esteem or value of self².

This topic was extensively discussed; how administrative professionals can and should take the lead and manage themselves as effectively as they manage their managers.

² Lloyd E., 2010 – Masters Thesis “Administrative professionals in New Zealand; their professional development opportunities and career pathways” <https://aapnz.org.nz/research>

Outcome

The **purpose** of this paper is to acknowledge and enhance the identity and image of administrative professionals by administrative professionals themselves.

This paper sets out:

- the lists of words developed during the discussion in 2018, as recorded in the notes,
- the understanding behind those discussions that led to those words being recorded.

Three axes summarize all ideas, actions, recommendations, attitudes, and skills resulting from the above questions:



Personal Identity and Image - *Self*

1. Investing in personal development

While for many professions (e.g. teacher, lawyer, accountant) it is expected that the required qualification is attained prior to entering the workforce, this is often not the case for those in the administrative profession, primarily because in many countries, entry to the profession does not require a qualification. However, it is imperative for

those who work in the profession to recognise the value of ensuring they continue their own professional development and take charge of this either within their workplace or outside it.

2. Increasing awareness and consciousness

Consciousness is a quality of our mind, but it is not our total mind. Awareness means that the total mind has become aware.

We must increase and train our ability to focus attention on ourselves, or thoughts, actions, and feelings but we must also be aware of our skills and abilities at work. Being increasingly aware of our skills and abilities at work will result in recognition of where our skills are most effective and where we may require improvement in our effectiveness.

3. Be proactive

We must ask ourselves:

- am I relevant in my organisation?
- How do I perceive my profile and tasks?
- How can I embrace the future if not starting from me?
- How can I set my career pathway and drive it forward?

Answering these questions will assist us to be more proactive within our roles and within our personal and professional development.

4. Internal and external perception

It does not matter how we name our profession (job titles etc..). We must define our identity to “market” ourselves and to evolve. We must understand the “What” we really are (core competencies, soft skills, leadership, EQ, etc.) within our roles.

Though professional development is essential to improve our own and others perception of our profession, our own attitude toward this profession is equally, if not more important. Having confidence in our competencies and personally defining our role rather than allowing others to define it, are both essential for removing the perception of ‘anyone can do it’ that is so often found.

Self-assessment often improves self-knowledge; both essential aspects in defining your role. We need to clearly understand the value we bring to our executives and teams; that we lead our role. We need to understand how aware we are individually about this perception.



5. Self-esteem

Self-esteem or “value of self”³ is the confidence we have in our ‘self’ - self-recognition of our personal values and qualities. Self-esteem is something that in some people is inherent, some acquire it readily, others require work to develop it.

People with strong self-esteem are often oriented to achieve results, complete things they have started, are willing to learn new things and launch themselves into compelling challenges. Self-esteem can be impacted both positively and negatively, by the social, work, family, and geographical environments in which we live. Self-esteem can be damaged or built according to those same social, work, family, and geographical environments.

6. Open Mind

People who are communicative and focused on what they do, seldom negatively compare themselves to others and know how to appreciate their uniqueness. And, perhaps most importantly, they are not afraid to make mistakes, to learn and gather learning from new challenges because they know that every failure brings with it an important lesson.

It is important to not limit ourselves and we must work to maintain an open mind.

7. Self-optimization

Cyberspace technology is working to make our lives easier, however in our off-line life we must be responsible for our own self-optimization. Preparing ourselves positively and developing a winning state of mind, which also allows for the possibility of failure, is a choice that will, almost certainly, reward us by developing physical and mental well-being. It will lead us to time- and work-life balance optimization

8. Be and set an example

Many administrative professionals have a role that would formerly have been titled secretary. The name has come from the “Keeper of Secrets” a role that in early times was a role which was second only to the ruler of a country.⁴ In today’s administrative professional role confidentiality is essential. Those in this role must be reliable and behave according to strong values and are accountable for their actions.

It is important to be and set an example of strong values, confidentiality, and reliability with this role. Additionally, administrative professionals are often asked to be the ‘spider in the web’, to see the big picture and act proactively.

³ Lloyd, E. - Thesis

⁴ Lloyd E., Thesis



9. Define yourself, do not allow others to define you⁵

We represent our brand in and out of the companies that employ us. We must demonstrate our readiness to keep up, our agility, and our willingness through our passion, conviction, and energy within our roles. We must be sure that we define who we are within our working roles and not accept or allow others to define those roles for us.

10. Recognise our own value

The aim is to help us to be proud of our roles as administrative professionals. We need to demonstrate within our workplaces and recognise how effective and valuable we are and set a framework of practises that help define who we are within those roles.

11. Recognise our accomplishments

Historically, and even today, it would appear we tend to focus on our failings and what we lack rather than on our accomplishments.

This paper and the accompanying templates are aimed at demonstrating and ratifying or recognising, initially to ourselves, all positive and successful achievements throughout our professional careers.

12. Shaping our own future

To lead a successful change process in the perception of our careers, we must have a comprehensive strategy, future vision, and useful business models which provide a clear pathway and a plan of execution to move from vision to reality.

13. Investing in our self

Investing in yourself may be the most profitable investment you can make. The effort you put into it plays a large role in determining the quality of your life, now and in the future. Advance your education, use all available training, attend conferences, participate in webinars - all aimed at developing your skills, knowledge, and capabilities. Expand your knowledge and your mind by reading industry relevant books, articles and be sure to keep current. Nurture your body and your mind to enhance your skills within your profession.

14. Positive attitude - “We can do it”

Success may be challenging to achieve, and failure is what most often discourages us and can negatively affect our attitude towards continuing to try. But what distinguishes successful entrepreneurs from the rest of the world? They return again and again to their idea and re-craft it until it becomes exceptional – their attitude makes the difference. We can succeed if we have the right attitude.

⁵ [“Value Ourselves So Others Value Us”](#), paper delivered at World Administrators Summit 2003



15. Defining the role

We must define our path and our role. We require a structured framework in place to deliver operational and tactical changes. It is up to us to develop and work to that framework.

The tools provided by this task force are aimed at helping and enabling all administrative professionals to manage their own personal and professional situation.

These tools; provide opportunities to gather specific information to assist with gaining professional and personal outcomes to benefit the individual administrative professional, and are to be shared among our profession all over the world.

Being successful requires passion for our work and a clearly defined role with objectives.

16. Attitude – Confidence

Be yourself. Be comfortable with what you do, smile. Understand the skills and competencies you hold and stand just that little bit taller.

Develop and understand yourself, know your strengths. If you have the right attitude you can identify where you require improvement, you can learn from your mistakes, and teach others.

17. See the big picture

We should think of the future, or think of other parallel factors, and not focus on and get caught up in the small details.

Having an overall objective and wider perspective helps us reframe situations and evolve.

18. Prioritize your development – Lifelong learning

If we want to keep up to date, be relevant and sustainable, we must be aware and take on that we are learning for life. This means that we must learn how to manage resources, opportunities, and lead the change and challenges in the future for example learn about and understand the positive impacts of artificial intelligence to your role and within your workplace; become a champion of that change to benefit your employment.

After entering the workforce, it is essential for those who work in the profession to recognize the value of ensuring they continue their own professional development and take charge of this either within their workplace or outside it. Giving priority to personal development is an investment in self and working on self-optimization. This professional attitude in one's development can be expected to be breaking mind limits.

According to Wikipedia lifelong learning is the "ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated" pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons". Therefore, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development, but also self-sustainability, competitiveness and employability. Lifelong learning is just as important for administrative professionals as for any other profession.

19. Self-awareness

Becoming more self-aware can help you understand your wants, needs, desires as well as your strengths and weaknesses. Self-awareness is also an important tool for success.

Our internal mental processes guide how we behave and how we act. When we become more self-aware, we begin uncovering the destructive thought patterns and unhealthy habits, which provides the opportunity to change them.

22. In conclusion:

All adults, as they walk their personal path and stages in life, learn that their personal growth is the keystone of their development. After all, it is impossible to offer skills and knowledge that you do not have.

Professional Identity and Image - Role

1. Creating and updating your Portfolio

The skills that make any professional competitive and unique are not given and are not always relevant to their academic education. Many skills are to do with the individual's personality and ability to meet certain professional expectations. To support these inherent skills, one must create and maintain a portfolio of evidence. This portfolio could be written or be a digital showcase of skills and achievements, intended to highlight the required competences in the specific job for which you are applying. A complete portfolio should include:

- personal statement ("who you are" e.g. values, commitment, work ethic)
- your Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- your education and training certificates
- LinkedIn profile
- achievements (including evidence/examples)

- project experience
- references and recommendations.

2. Questions to ask

Asking questions for what you believe you deserve (for example benefits, professional development, rights, raise, bonus) increases the possibility of getting what you want and what you deserve. To do that effectively you need to:

- know who you are
- know what you want
- understand the business environment
- be specific
- be able to support your statement
- be flexible
- be fair
- be assertive

3. Ask for your manager's support

Being consistent and building trust with your manager, will help you improve yourself, build your confidence, develop your self-esteem, and positively impact how you are seen by other managers and colleagues. People will feel comfortable working with you which will build your professional reputation and help provide positive energy within you. Being supportive and supported is one of the strongest tools for an administrative professional.

4. Work as a partner to your manager

Every administrative professional and manager build an alliance with a common purpose which requires mutual trust, co-operation, and partnership. You need to get involved effectively in the business, do not rely on others to do that for you.

You must participate and anticipate, problem solve and become an agile team player, leading others to understand your value to the team. To do that you need to understand your manager, yourself, and the business to make things work.

Be the best version of yourself you can be, behave the way you present yourself in your CV and your portfolio – promote yourself and your role.

5. Be accountable

Accountability is a requirement for administrative professionals as they:

- contribute to the management of the company
- undertake important projects
- have access to confidential information.

Being accountable is not only about having that responsibility, it is also about being able to report about it thoroughly.



6. Be proud of your profession

Being an administrative professional is working in a profession to be proud of. It is often presented as a stepping-stone to a higher-level role. However, even if that is the case, it is critical to identify and respect the significance and value of this role as it is vital to the business process.

You must strive to demonstrate your qualities as a leader, see yourself as a manager and operate in the way that your executive would.

7. Identify yourself alongside your manager

Many administrative professionals still do not have their own business cards. Some do not use a proper signature or reference in their e-mail signature. You, however, are a point of reference for your manager and your employer. Therefore, include your name and your role title alongside that of your manager in electronic communications. Ask for your own business card or ask your manager to consider including your name on theirs as being that valuable point of contact.

Regardless of the tasks you perform, your business card is a handshake that lasts far beyond your first contact. It is an easy way for people to reference your contact information and connect with you. They get to know who you are and who your manager is.

It is about professional presentation of yourself, your role, and your value to your manager.

8. Sharing your knowledge – Reverse mentoring

As sharing your knowledge and experience is about helping others to identify and develop their skills, using the tools of coaching and mentoring not only helps you to help other professionals to develop and improve their potentials, but also enforces your professional image.

There is no limit on training and gaining new experience, no matter how long serving, how well trained, how successful, how complete you might be in your field. Either as a trainer or as trainee this is a win-win situation that helps both parts to evolve. We can all share our knowledge and we can all learn from others especially in this rapidly changing digital world.

Reverse mentoring will be introduced more and more in the future, especially because of different generation gaps. We can all share our special skills or knowledge, and this is a great benefit for the whole organisation.

9. Appraisals/Career Pathways

Each country, organization or field is governed by specific policies and career plans: what is important is to have continuous feed-back, on a weekly or monthly basis with your manager.



People Development (Human Resources) departments are used to evaluation appraisals as one of their major tools within their work. These are therefore something which we need to be aware of, understand, and participate fully in. Listen, observe, and learn as much as you can during any form of evaluation or appraisal to improve your skills and enhance your success in your role.

10. Professional development

Educational and vocational training should never be considered a one-off situation. Continuous improvement, or life-long learning, is a vital mind-set for every successful person. Professional development strengthens your business presence and your competitive advantage, it ensures you maintain and enhance your skill levels, your underlying knowledge and your ability to improve and enhance the way you do your day-to-day work.

11. Professional association membership

Being a member of a professional association increases your credibility and demonstrates your professionalism as it shows interest, dedication, commitment, and pride in your chosen career. Membership of your professional association gives you access to a valuable network, which may even be international, access to knowledge beyond your own current skills, and support when “the going gets tough”.

A professional association is where you can share your own knowledge and skills and learn from others in an environment which is supportive and provides discussion with others who understand your role.

12. Be open and ready to take opportunities

In today’s professional environment, which is changing rapidly, new possibilities are constantly being created. As administrative professionals we must be able to adapt quickly and to move forward. We must be agile.

The working world is not stagnant, and neither are we. We must be proactive, vigilant, and be able to take advantage of every opportunity. We must be alert to every opportunity that allows us to grow either inside our current professional environment or in a new one.

13. Facilitate/collaborate

Within the nature of our role we anticipate solutions, we facilitate change, we are resilient, we allow communication processes to flow in and out because we are focused on the company and business. Our role demands we are team player (even if only a team of two, you and your manager). Collaboration is a requirement and we must take ownership and care of each single action we take.



14. Change the voice/Change the language

Being a leader is a matter not only of focus on the business but also of demonstrating managerial behaviour. How we do things, behave, speak, and write are critical. Our manner must be calm and polite, we must use accurate words, appropriate tone of voice, remember our body language. The way we talk, move and dress impact our creating the appropriate impression.

15. Who manages our manager?

We need to be aware of the people who manage our manager. We must understand the goals and outcomes our manager has committed to with whoever they report to. Our aim should be to assist our manager to achieve those goals and outcomes.

We must provide direct and prompt access to our manager for that higher-level person, and it is important that we are aware of our interactions with them. Those who manage our manager are part of the organisation that employs us, and they therefore deserve to be treated with appropriate respect and consideration.

16. In conclusion

Having built a strong personal and professional persona and portfolio, it is time for the mature, assertive, confident administrative professional to claim their professional and dynamic presence in the business world.

Business Identity and Image - Profession

1. Be an advocate for our profession

How many managers and colleagues are fully aware of:

- the quality and amount of work administrative professionals are faced with daily?
- how much professionalism and responsibility we manage?
- how both high level hard and soft skills are required in this role?

This role is not "just" about coordinating agendas, meetings, travel, nor "just" to draw up documents, tables, and projects. We manage time, information, relationships, trust, and human capital.

Our profession contains an inexhaustible requirement for learning, as our days and the knowledge we require constantly changes. We are employees who are expected



to be of high trust, and we have multiple opportunities daily to be in touch with the core business of our employer.

Dealing with executives and often working in a multicultural environment we learn about leadership and many new skills. We have access to knowledge, and we see opportunities for growth which we take advantage of, to be perceived as real business partners of our managers.

Individually we need to be an advocate for our profession in the way we describe it and perform it. The word “just” must be removed from the description of our work.

2. Be professional

The way we speak, write, and use our body language is extremely important and has a significant impact on how we are perceived. Our habits, activities and behaviours play a crucial role in our profession. We are responsible for the impression we make and for the image of our managers and our office/company.

From our professional language, pace, and sensitivity, we generate a stream of actions, communications and decisions. We must be aware of what we say and how we do it. We must maintain confidentiality, stay away from office gossip, and always maintain a high level of professionalism. We must keep in mind that if we want to enhance our “brand”, how we present ourselves is critical.

3. Collaborate with other associations

We, administrative professionals, are a valuable asset to our manager, our management team, our colleagues and our employer. Recognition of our role, abilities and qualities start from us, from our associations and communities.

In our role we strive to be a strategic business partner and a knowledgeable advisor. Therefore, when we wish to upskill, we should also be active networkers and collaborate with managerial and human resource associations and communities so that we can learn from them.

4. Influence recruiters

Recruiters are not always aware of our identity and image. They often classify administrative professionals by the industry they work in and do not understand that the skills we hold cross over almost all industries. They often do not understand that there is a change from and a difference between a secretary and an executive assistant.

We must not allow our role to be defined by others. If we want to be recognised and seen as relevant and important by recruiters and employment agencies, we must raise the awareness that the work we do is a recognisable profession.

We must:



- promote our development, define our identity, demonstrate our skills.
- communicate clearly and develop skills as influencers.
- communicate what our added value is to the core business.
- be clear about what our career's mission and vision are.

Instead of focussing on role titles, we must promote our skill sets or profiles by providing continuous feedback to and contact with recruiters and employment agencies.

5. Perception of our vibrant career

Our job is amazing. We deal with exciting challenges daily. We see and deliver leadership and generally enjoy the opportunity to work in a partnership with top executives.

Our career is vibrant, we have to constantly evolve. We need to manage our own growth and development continuously and consistently. We must help others by sharing and developing this same awareness. These steps will lead to achieving successful performance and results.

6. Have good credentials

It is important to set a frame around your career, starting from yourself.

What are your career projects and resources, your accomplishments, and your goals?

If you aspire to have a more rewarding career—expanding career options, increasing your earning power, and boosting your confidence you may need specific credentials, such as industry certifications or qualifications.

This is not specifically about academic credentials but more an assessment of your “experiences on the job”. Obtaining an industry credential or certification shows lifelong learning and demonstrates commitment to continuous development to be the best we can. Additionally, this will verify that our knowledge is current and valid.

7. Set and meet appropriate standards

The world is changing rapidly, therefore we need to explore, set, and achieve new standards. We are no longer simple executors, we have effectiveness (meaning we have influence and authority).

We are leaders, we operate and do things as a manager would do, we build relationships with diplomacy and emotional intelligence, we are team players, we are the point of reference at the core of the organisation. We see the big picture: we understand the purpose, we set the direction and we know our employers' objectives.



This means that we can expand our role laterally, dedicate time to learn new skills, become an expert in our area and mentor others. As we work to innovate and expand our businesses, being open to collaborative leadership is another opportunity.

As an administrative professional, with strong personal and professional skills, you are capable of establishing yourself as an irreplaceable and vital part of any organization.

8. National and International presence

In our role it is essential to interact with people at all levels with kindness and respect. Getting to know new people and establish new relationships is vital and stimulating and above all provides mutual and lasting benefits. We should all network both off-and on-line. It can be on internal networks and platforms or on external professional social media such as LinkedIn.

We should attend international events for the profession, keeping in touch through social media with associations and communities of administrative professionals around the world.

9. In conclusion

The more we learn and the better we communicate; the more clearly we convey our image as true business partners within our organisations. We therefore will be able to positively communicate using models, best practice, and success stories.

Recommendations

The Task Force has expanded the discussion points from the 2018 WA-Summit in this paper. It has developed Templates⁶ (separate documents) for a Personal Professional Portfolio, Self-Assessment and Performance Appraisal.

The Task Force now makes the following recommendations to the Delegates at the 11th WA-Summit:

1. **THAT** the Delegates of the 11th WA-Summit discuss this document, after having consulted within their own countries, and provide feedback so the Task Force can adjust to ensure it meets the requirements of Administrative Professionals globally.
2. **THAT** the Delegates of the 11th WA-Summit approve this Task Force submitting these documents to the governing body (WA-Summit Advisory Council or WA-Alliance Council), after any requested changes agreed on have been made and approved, to be included on the WA-Summit website to provide support to all

⁶ Templates 1a – Developing a Personal Professional Portfolio
1b – Self Assessment
1c – Performance Appraisal with your Manager



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administrative professionals globally as they work towards raising the image of this profession.