

11th World Administrators Summit COUNTRY REPORT

COUNTRY: ITALY

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ASSOCIATION / NETWORK / ORGANISATION: IMA ITALY

As stated in [Administra](#), monitoring and evaluating the World Action Plan is as important as identifying the objectives and strategies of your Association/Network. A major advantage of monitoring and evaluation is that Associations/Networks can learn a great deal about themselves, and how to lead, manage and improve their own activities and status by implementing this Action Plan. Another advantage is to ensure that the World Action Plan is helpful to Associations/Networks throughout the world in developing their own strategic or business plans.

Each country sending delegates to a World Administrators Summit is asked to report against a selected Goal in Administra.

The Country Reports will be shared on the WA-Summit website as pre-read for the 11th WA-Summit.

Please explain how your Association/Network/Organisation is using Goal 1 to develop your activities:

Goal 1: Managing Administrative Skills

Objective 1.1: Enhancing the perceived value of administrative/office professionals:

On increasing national awareness and local awareness as an appealing career option

This is our mission and our ultimate goal as an association, so every effort and every action go in this direction, be it working on strategies or developing tactics. Networking moments, internal discussions and exchange among peers, formal or informal, among members, with prospects and leads, one-to-one conversation any time we are asked about information help develop awareness.

On collaborating with other like-minded Associations/Networks nationally and internationally

IMA Italy has recently entered into a partnership with a newly born, local association, Unassyst, to promote knowledge sharing and reach all the stakeholders of the role (HR managers, recruiters, executives). The partnership is based on a shared vision and shared values, while working on slightly different targets, so with different programs, plus joint events/activities to ensure that all geography and levels of professional development are covered. The partnership leverages on the added value that each of the two organizations can put on the table separately, to team up and reach a common goal.



On promoting the requirement of formal qualifications for admin nationally and internationally/Research nationally what business requires from the administrative/office professional now and in the future

There are no dedicated schools/university degrees for the role in Italy. The whole education path to grant a qualification for the role is completely absent, from high school to 1st- and 2-level master degree. Therefore, the requirement of formal qualification for admins is not something we can simply promote, this is something we need to implement. In 2019-2020 IMA Italy has got in touch with a private university and co-developed a 2nd-level Master degree, targeting 1st-level degree holders/potential professionals in the role. Three IMA members teach at the Master, covering topics such as the perimeter and content of the role, how to build a career in the role, what skills/competences need to be acquired to be an Assistants, how to build a relationship with the Executive, as well as project management, teambuilding, information management and time management.

As for certifications acknowledged internationally, like A.C.E.A. for example, which 3 IMA Italy members possess, this is something which still needs to be fully promoted with Italian companies. As of today, we do not know of any company that recruits assistants because of their certification, or companies who expressly look for certified assistants. To be a certified assistant in Italy is a plus, but it is not required, and there are many small-medium companies in which to be a certified assistant (i.e an overskilled professional) is a deterrent to get the job. An overskilled professional must be paid accordingly and many companies in Italy cannot afford this because the labour cost is huge and most of the companies are not ready to make such an investment. On top of it, cultural bias prevent Executives to equip themselves with skilled assistants, because they do not even know what the content and the potential of the role are. Due to Italian average organizational structure, many of the tasks of a skilled assistant (project management, IT skills, legal skills) are carried out by other functions, as a consequence, an assistant is only requested to stick to average tasks like answering the phone, monitoring the e-mails (but not really managing information) and keeping the calendar updated (but not managing time).

Small-medium companies, many of them family-owned or second-generation, family-owned, are the 80% of the economic background in Italy. In these companies, there is a total lack of role recognition, unclear perception, lack of training, no request for specialization, skills and competences. Also, in these companies structures are very small and flat, and there is no need for the function, so employability can become an issue. Given this background, for an association to raise awareness is a long, slow paced journey.

Another very typical aspect of the Italian economic background is the fact that Italian companies are very strong in product development and innovation (this is where the biggest investments go), with very little development and investment in organizational structure and personnel/talent development.

Employability of the role lies in the remaining 20%, namely service companies in the big cities, multinationals' subsidiaries plus a few, enlightened companies which are starting to recognize the importance of people development: these are the ones which are sensitive to the big potential of employing Executive Assistants/PAs/Office Managers. These companies should be the primary target to address, to leverage on, so to implement the cultural change we need.

In a pandemic world, once out of the first emergency and as it becomes clear that we will have to deal with pandemic dynamics for a while, the unpredictable trends are changing the way businesses are managed or entrepreneurs take risks. A lot of effort needs to be put in keeping teams together and motivated even when everybody is remote working and managing relationship inside teams and along processes. According to our sources, the impact on Management Assistants covers quite a range: some of them were immediately put in remote working, and they found out that it was not possible for them to work, mainly because of poor IT infrastructure, especially outside big cities; some of them were pivotal in crisis management teams and were required to go to work every day at least until a new routine was implemented; some of them were immediately put in remote working and asked to manage teams and Executives



remotely. Being able to manage working team from remote, keeping them focused, motivated, aligned and efficient, may be one of the new requirements for the role.

Objective 1.2: Increase awareness of the value of administrative skills in business:

On the importance of being a member of a professional association/network

It is our goal to increase awareness and foster a network of peers as an association. We believe that networking, knowledge sharing and mentorship programs are crucial in raising awareness. In our experience, however, the will to belong to an association is a very personal factor: you cannot convince who is not ready/willing/able to commit, or is not interested in doing it (for whatever reason). To pay a fee, to invest time, money and energy to work for the advocacy of the role is not something which comes that easy: you cannot rely on the need to be a good professionally only, the most crucial element is passion. You need to be passionate for the role.

We strongly believe that the advocacy for the role needs to be taken one step further, addressing the importance and potential of the role with HR managers, recruiters and executives, yet we still have in Italy too many Assistants who are not aware that they can be on a career path in their job. Sometimes the first to be convinced are Assistants themselves. To address this point is part of the partnership between IMA Italy and Unassyst and will be targeted with dedicated activities in the future.

On encouraging employers to acknowledge skills from being involved at committee level or above within professional Associations/networks

There still too many Executives who are afraid that such activities may take time away from the job, or from “them and their needs”, but -see above- in a few enlightened companies curricula which include such experiences are starting to be valued. To be in the position to push such acknowledgement very much depends on what type of company one is working at, or what type of executive one is assisting.

On clearly define job descriptions

Again, it depends on how sensitive a company is, so the margin of action can vary, because to have clear job descriptions for the role, possibly aligned with international, recognized standards, is part of people management and HR, usually this is not something that a single assistant or an association can push, if the company is not ready for it.

On educating people outside the profession that it is a profession

This is difficult to do on a structured basis because it requires a cultural change. Also, people outside the profession may be stakeholders but they are not a primary target, and when you have to allocate resources (time and money) on activities, they are not the first ones to be targeted. For sure you can educate people one by one as you meet them and they ask you what your job is. Then you have your shot at it.

Objective 1.3: Have globally recognised credentialing/accreditation:

On promoting assessment of skill gaps to help guide training requirements

To assess skill gaps and members' *desiderata* is a must and always the first step in IMA Italy's planning of training offer. We usually consult with members and prospects at least once a year, we listen, and we develop training programs



specifically dedicated to the role. This means that we do not offer a standard training program and have assistants attend it, but we shape the offer to the specific needs of assistants.

Objective 1.4: To encourage businesses and the global community to view the administrative/office professionals' role as a career:

On involving Government for support

Processes to involve Government in Italy are too slow and too long, and they do not make it worth while to invest time and energy in it. Burocracy is an issue. We have other primary targets we can focus on and obtain a better ROI of our activity.

On promoting the role as a career

One of the main issues in Italy is that not even assistants themselves consider their job in a career path, so it is difficult to create a critical mass on this point. Most of them get to the job by chance (we do not have any dedicated schooling path to the role) and only then do they realize that it can be a career. Also, to “make a career” (= *fare carriera*) in Italian does not mean “to spend a consistent time working in the same role and grow in it”, but it means “to achieve an important status in your job”: as an assistant, if you progress in your role, you can come too close to your executive’s position. Many executives, and many companies, tend to stop a career path at first stages, to avoid any overlapping. It is your typical “crystal ceiling” effect. Since chances are very small, many assistants do not even try. Many even change profession entirely.

On mentorship and coaching other professionals

IMA Italy has a mentorship program ongoing and we currently have two mentor-mentee teams working, one of which is focusing on career development and the other one is focusing specifically on communication re-skilling. We also have some young members who often request the guide of senior members even outside of the structured mentorship program. At least one senior member is always available for them.

Objective 1.5: Achieve common understanding between training providers, administrative/office professionals associations and employers about the value of a required qualification and/or credentialing/accreditation:

On marketing the importance of specific training/credentialing/accreditation

At IMA Italy we always brief trainers and ask them to tailor trainings on the specific needs of the role. They are usually available to do it, but it is sometimes difficult for them to understand what the real needs are, because they have no idea what the role is.

Many of them have already established training programs for Assistants, which they develop according to the needs of the executives/companies, and for this reason do not address the real potential of the role. Also, many companies, when they invest in training Assistants, tend to ask for practical training on the tasks, not so much on more strategical aspects.



Objective 1.6: Associations contribute to recognise the professional and personal development of their administrative/office professional members:

This is how an association stays alive and grows. However, to belong to an association means to pay a fee and to commit to giving one's time and much energy: to manage an Association requires some work done on voluntary basis. Many do not commit because they have no time to dedicate, many do not have the financial capacity to pay the fee, or to do it consistently, many are simply not interested because they do not see the potential or they do not perceive themselves on a career path. As said above, the choice to belong to an association is a very personal commitment made for different reasons. If leads/prospects lack passion or interest for the job, they will not usually become members, regardless of any effort to convince them. IMA Italy is part of an international association and unfortunately there are a lot of Assistants in Italy who are not interested in an international venue or network (one of the main reasons is that their English is not fluent enough to attend international events or trainings) or who cannot afford to pay for traveling /attending international events. This limits our scope a bit, and we position ourselves as a niche association, for Management Support Professionals who are very committed to the role, at ease in an international environment, who look for high standards of quality.

Objective 1.7: Investigate the logistics of forming an international body to look at developing a global framework in which qualifications, accreditation, certification and professional development could be recognized internationally.

We believe this is a joint effort and an activity to be executed at an international level, this is why we are part of the WA Alliance.

