

THE BLUEPRINT ON THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE PA/EA

Preparing yourself for the year 2025



Moving forward in your profession
Moving up in your career



Getting your **OFFICE PRODUCTS** from anywhere else is pointless!

Office National has it all!

With over 60 outlets across the country we bring a whole new meaning to being local and ensure your stationery and office products are just a phone call or email away.

Contact us for our comprehensive 162 page Office Products Catalogue.

Let us see how we can help you!

Stationery • Technology • Office Furniture and more...



Contents

PUBLISHER'S NOTE 4

INTRODUCTION 6

CHAPTER 1 7

Foreword: Michiel Jonker (SA) 8

Anchor Feature by futurist Verne Wheelright (USA) 10

Opinion Piece: Dr Jari Kaivo-oja (Finland) 12

Focus Feature: by Natalie Bassa including Charlotte Human, Diana Morais, Professor Deon Nel 14

Last Word: Christopher Patrick Peterka 22

CHAPTER 2 23

Foreword: by futurist Charles Brass (Australia) 24

Anchor Feature: by futurist Biraj Naidoo (UAE) 26

Opinion Piece: by author Jan Jones (USA) 28

Focus Feature: by Nadia Williams-Mabaso, including Karen Bonhomme, Yolisa Bethela, Rechi Dlamini 30

Last Word: by futurist Jim Caroll (Canada) 38

CHAPTER 3 39

Foreword: by futurist Graeme Codrington (SA/UK) 40

Anchor Feature: by futurist Daniel Burrus (USA) 42

Opinion Piece: by expert Mark Dixon (Brussels) 44

Focus Feature by Milicent Chanetsa, including Carine Daniels, Sonja Bohlander, Arthur Goldstuck 46

Last Word: by Erica Volini and Garth Andrus (USA) 53

CHAPTER 4 55

Foreword: by futurist Chris Bishop (USA) 56

Anchor Feature: by futurist Jonathan Crossland (SA) 58

Opinion Piece: by trends analyst Reana Rossouw (SA) 60

Focus Feature by Linda van Noordwyk, Christelle Dippenaar, Nerine Ungerer, Prof. Alwyn Louw 62

Last Word: by futurist Godfrey Parkin 69

CHAPTER 5 71

Foreword: by futurist Bronwyn Williams (SA) 72

Anchor Feature: by futurist Srdjan Kupresanin (Austria) 74

Opinion Piece: by computer scientist Andrew Yan-Tak Ng 78

A Focus Feature: by Mastoora Ramiah, including Angie Orsmond, Feroza Sader, Joey Staphorst 80

Last Word: by futurist Marli van der Merwe (SA) 88

CHAPTER 6 90

Foreword: by futurist Rohit Talwar (UK), together with Alexandra Whittington, Steve Wells, April Koury, Maria Romero, and Karolina Dolatowska 90

Anchor Feature: by futurist Ruben T Miller (SA) 94

Opinion Piece: by futurist Flavio Liberal (Brazil) 96

Focus Feature: by Heidi Stiger including Simone Muller, Michelle Whitaker, Dr Morne Mostert 98

Last Word: by founder of Practically Perfect PA, Nicky Christmas (USA) 106

EPILOGUE 108

WORLDWIDE SURVEY 110

Buckle-up to a wonderful ride to the future

It does not take rocket science to see that the world of work has significantly changed - and is heading for infinitely more changes, some of which we can imagine and already feel, yet others are as yet unknown and unimaginable.

We all wish we could have an oracle to see what the future brings, but wishful thinking is not going to get us very far - doing some homework is the obvious recommended route. And PAFSA (www.pafsa.co.za) an association for the PA, EA and Admins, based in South Africa, decided to take on the task of surveying the world of work as it is, and as it will likely be in the future.

PAFSA's first step: The existing working world of the PA

In 2016 as technology was already noticeably pervasive, we felt there was a need to get a good glimpse of the contemporary reality of the working world of the PA - what skills were priority and where; what attributes were most in demand, and what designations prevailed.

Together with six PAs, one of which was South Africa's PA of the Year 2016, and the five finalists, we designed a survey which was sent worldwide via emails, Facebook and LinkedIn. You will see at the back of this publication the number of countries that responded as well as the findings of the survey.

This information confirmed that technology was clearly hugely facilitating and automating some of the tasks of the PA, and the consequent move of the PA to new tasks as a result. It also showed us an increase in the situation of one PA being shared by a couple of executives - this being the result of, among other factors, executives also using technology to help themselves.

PAFSA's second step : Forecasting the coming working world of the PA

What was imperative was to engage different communities of professionals, and involve forecasting tools, to examine likely scenarios for PAs worldwide as the exponential growth and impact of technology would infinitely more affect their responsibilities and significance in the brave new world of work that is around the corner.

Together with six PAs again, this time the South Africa's PA of the Year 2017 and the five finalists, we set out on an adventure to explore the potential future scenarios

In brief:

The challenge was - Imagining the year 2025!

The purpose was - To create a publication to be titled: *'Blueprint for the future role of the PA/EA.'*

The approach was - Using collective intelligence to map out various likely scenarios.

The aim of the project was - To prepare PAs for exponential change, and

- Deal with uncertainty
- Identify the challenge as technology burrows into the world of work
- Anticipate change to their role, and foresee new career dimensions
- Prepare for the future, and ultimately to convey the message that::
- Uncertainty should not deter preparation.

Each chapter of this Blueprint is rich in perspectives, ideas, suggestions and scenarios. Each chapter is a must-read for any PA/EA who is keen to excel and remain relevant in the changing world of work.

PAFSA expresses its deep gratitude to the futurists from all over the world, the academics and the PAs who participated in this project by sharing their perspectives for the benefit of PAs worldwide.

“PAFSA expresses its deep gratitude to the futurists from all over the world, the academics and the PAs who participated in this project by sharing their perspectives for the benefit of PAs worldwide.”

From all the contributors, you will find views ranging from optimist, to realist and pessimist (very few) in so far as the future role of the PA will look like. We believe that all views stand to apply – depending on the size of the organisation the future PA will work for or with; depending on how soon or tardy the executives embrace the new technology; and depending on the PAs themselves who will have to make choices.

What was interesting to note is how everyone sees the impact of the prominence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics affecting the role of the human worker in the workplace of the future.

As publishers of this publication, and as directors of PAFSA, we wish you continued success, and that as the PA role becomes enhanced, so do you get to fulfil your best career aspirations to be one of the most valued team members of the decision-making circle of the future organisation.

The future is yours if you embrace it as of today!

The Publishers
 Ana-Maria Valente
 Ornella Trinco



anamaria@pafsa.co.za ornella@pafsa.co.za

How the Blueprint was put together

We started by identifying six major areas that the Blueprint would address with regard to the future of the PA and the world of work around the year 2025. Each of those areas would become a chapter in the publication.

PAFSA's President, Mastoora Ramiah, and five finalists of South Africa's PA of the Year Award 2017 Linda van Noordwyk, Milicent Chanetsa, Nadia Williams-Mabaso, Natalie Bassa and Heidi Stiger (who took the title) were allocated one of the six focus areas, and tasked with consulting (interview style) two peers around the specific topic and the issue of the future of the PA/Admin profession as a whole.

Furthermore, an academic or expert in this field would also be interviewed by them in order to gauge views from another perspective.

In the end, they had to write an article (a Focus Feature) expressing their own views as well as including the view they had acquired from their interviewees. We thank all the interviewees for agreeing to participate.

Meanwhile, at PSAFSA's head office, Ana-Maria Valente, started identifying futurists and trend analysts worldwide whose opinion would be highly valuable in forecasting future scenarios that would impact on the PA/EA's role as well as on the workplace.

Leading names in futurism responded positively to the invitation to participate and PAFSA is truly honoured and grateful for this. Their articles appear in the front of each chapter and at the end as well. As each chapter is a component in itself, we decided that these articles would be categorised as Foreword, Anchor Feature, Opinion Piece and Last Word.

Preceding this exercise, was a major worldwide survey on the profession conducted by the 2016 finalists and titleholder, PA of the Year 2016. The findings of the survey are attached to this Blueprint and are highly valuable as they show the profession in transition.

In conclusion, PAFSA expresses its deep admiration to its luminary members who, as volunteers, take on tasks that are of value to the profession as a whole, nationally and internationally.

Connect with PAFSA on www.pafsa.co.za

Follow us on facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/ExcellencePA/> and on: <https://www.facebook.com/iyotsa2014/>

Please note: Opinions expressed in any article do not necessarily reflect on the publishers. All submissions to the Blueprint were subject to editorial change to suit the style of the publication. The right of reproduction of any article or other matter published herein is expressly reserved.©

Chapter 1

The will to succeed is important,
but what's more important
is the will to prepare.

– Bobby Knight

Preparing yourself for the year 2025:

OPENING THE HEART AND MIND

Featuring:

FOREWORD by futurist Michiel Jonker (SA)

ANCHOR FEATURE by futurist Verne Wheelright (USA)

OPINION PIECE by futurist Dr Jari Kaivo-oja (Finland)

FOCUS FEATURE by PA, Natalie Bassa, finalist in South Africa's PA of the Year 2017. She also interviews:

- Charlotte Human, PA at Norton Rose Fullbright Attorneys
- Diana Morais, PA to Advocate Benny Makola and Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi
- An academic: Professor Deon Nel from Rhodes University

LAST WORD by Christopher Patrick Peterka



What is the future role of the secretary, PA, EA, Admin Assistant in an organisation? The question is problematic for several reasons. It is a very broad question as there are differences between these roles. These dissimilarities are further compounded by the diverse needs of different sectors, industries and organisations. Not to mention the individual requirements of different bosses and the differing perceptions about these roles.

So, it really depends on who you ask.

If you ask a Tech Futurist, a coup by robots is just around the corner not only replacing the PA, but everyone! However, this comment does not negate or diminish the role of technology in an organisation or life in general.

The future beckons, prepare yourself!

Twenty to twenty-five years ago, many organisations still had typing pools, with secretaries typing letters, documents, memorandums and who knows what else, working from audio messages or rough (sometimes uninterpretable) notes from the bosses.

The introduction of the personal computer and word processing software into the work place obliterated these typing pools with one fell swoop (although other contextual pressures also played a role), as the writing of (at least draft) documents and memorandums was progressively 'pushed back to the boss'. Think about it, an email is the old corporate memorandum on steroids! Today, in many instances, the boss is writing

these memorandums and sending these to the entire organisation at the click of a button.

Most certainly, new technology, based on machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) technology will change the role of the PA, again. And, yes, new tools will automate many tasks, currently executed by the PA.

For example: Diary management, and the co-ordination of multiple parties' availability within and across many organisations, is sometimes a complicated task to fulfil. I believe that this task will, eventually, be accomplished by AI – with only little guidance from the PA.

The PA, a disguised title for other roles!

Over the past two decades the number of employed

PAs decreased in some companies. We started seeing one PA serving many executives, but PAs also started to perform diverse tasks under disguised titles!

More and more executives started demanding more, turning the role of the PA into a full blown professional, assisting in the overall management of an executive's portfolio. Of course, it depends on the economic sector and industry too.

For example: In the consulting / advisory services industry PAs are generally expected to assist with the compilation of proposals. In order to do exactly that, a PA needs to understand the intrinsic nature of the service offerings.

PAs are also expected to manage CRM systems – and often the entire client pipeline. PAs also need to understand basic financial concepts, as they assist in managing Work In Progress (WIP) accounts. Many PAs today are also responsible for organising all kinds of events. And so the list goes on and on.

Not a case of 'either or' but of "both and"!

Humans need to survive, but they have always had difficulty envisioning their future role in conjunction with the use of technology. This lack of vision is also further complicated by the philosophy of 'either or'.

For example: It is either a complete technology take-over or the perpetuation of the status quo. It cannot be a combination of both or parts of both. When e-books started to come to the fore, predictions were that e-books would replace physical books. It hasn't happened so far. In fact, Amazon opened its first physical book store in 2015 and is continuing this trend. But, these stores combine some of the positives of their online technology with the physical world's features.

In other words: Amazon's physical book stores are actually exhibiting a phenomenon that we as Futurists call the 'both and' philosophy – the exact opposite of the 'either or' philosophy.

Many times we would rather see a 'both and' scenario materialising, not an 'either or' scenario. Technology and technological take-overs will always follow the path of least resistance. And in instances where there should still be a clear or perceived value attached to the old

technology (e.g. a physical book), that technology should ideally co-exist with the new technology.

Yet, where the value proposition of new technology cannot demonstrate a total new value add a combination of old and new technology will be in use – including associated manual tasks. And this also applies to the PA role.

Create your future

Where new technology cannot demonstrate a total better value proposition, the PA would still be needed. Yet indeed, the PAs traditional role functions will be reduced in the future, and it is going to depend on the PAs of this world on how they see themselves adding value to an organisation in the future. Any Futurist would tell you that the best way to predict the future is to create it.

What is the desired or preferred image of the future of the PA function?

My suggestion is that PAs should play a pro-active role in defining their future. I provided some guidelines for consideration, but, in the end, it is going to depend on the PA profession's creativity to re-define their value proposition to meet the needs of their organisations and bosses.

So, in which direction would you like to see your profession go in the next twenty years?

Remember, it is better to create the future yourself than to wait for someone else to create it for you.

About the author

Michiel Jonker, is Director: IT Advisory (Grant Thornton); interests in business and IT strategy formulation, futuristic research and studies, with special interest in information technology. Contact: Michiel.Jonker@za.gt.com; amazon.com/dp/B007DQG8IC

What makes a change event important in your life?



All over the world, people are concerned with CHANGE. The climate is changing... technology is changing... the workplace is changing... and you are changing.

Yes, we are all changing. Our bodies and our minds change just about every decade of our lives. There are several things that bring about change, but the dominant force of change is simply that we get older.

Think about the differences from childhood to adolescence. Profound change. Lots of physical and emotional change as well as changes related to becoming independent.

The changes brought about by maturing and ageing may not seem most obvious during adolescence, but later on we become more alert to our physical changes.

Getting to grips with our various life stages and normal change has been a subject of interest since the time of Hippocrates, and understanding these stages and patterns can provide considerable insight into changes that you can anticipate in your future.

One of the most obvious forces of change is simply the things we do. As children it's our games, our learning. Then we start school and begin formal learning.

The games change to sports and organised activities. And the learning becomes more detailed and complex, then suddenly formal learning is over and we start careers.

Many changes in our lives are the result of our own decisions! These are changes that we make ourselves rather than those changes derived from external forces. Some of these decisions change the direction of our lives:

Choosing a career, deciding to marry, deciding to have children or deciding to divorce. These are sometimes referred to as "turning point" events.

Impact and Probability

What makes a change event important in your life?

Two characteristics that you should consider are impact and probability.

- How likely is an event to happen?

If an event happens in your life,

- What will be the impact on your life?

Right now you are probably facing changes all around you. If you are an Executive Assistant, the experience, exposure and knowledge you are gaining will likely start opening up career opportunities that will have impacts on your life and your future.

Futurists use probability and impact as key criteria when planning for future events. Events that are both highly probable and carry a high impact are the events that should be planned for.

Strategic planning in large organisations is generally based on high impact, high probability events. These concepts carry over well into our personal lives, so you should plan first for those events that have a high probability of occurring and will carry a high impact when they do occur.

Where can one learn about the future?

Your executives are probably concerned with acquiring the most knowledge possible about the future.

There are universities around the world that offer advanced degrees in Foresight and Futures Studies. One of them is the University of Stellenbosch in Cape Town. One can also learn about the methods of foresight by applying those methods to your personal life.

About the author

Dr Verne Wheelwright: Author: "It's YOUR Future, Make it a Good One!" and "The Personal Futures Workbook". My web site, www.personalfutures.net offers free PDF downloads, including my dissertation and the Personal Futures Workbook in English, Xhosa, and several other languages. My books are also available on Amazon.com.

Contact: personalfutures.net; wastepaper@msn.com

Few workers have undergone so many and significant changes in their work and careers as the Secretary/PA/EA/Admin Assistant professional.

In recognition of a special group of professionals



Many PAs and EAs started early in their careers as junior secretaries or in admin positions and worked their way up the ladder into more demanding positions by familiarising themselves with new work processes, IT technologies and software apps.

The challenge has been in the fact that the new technologies transforming the way work is done (and especially digital technologies) have not been particularly user-friendly. In addition, PAs have had to rely on suppliers or in-house techies for training on the use of the new-fangled working tools and technologies, including state-of-the-art printers, copiers, software, mobile smart phone, etc.

It is for this professional group that many ideas of self-development, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) and life-long learning strategy have come true in the hard and changing realities of work life.

Development of competencies

Through the medium of fancy presentations, many of these future challenges are nowadays spoken of and discussed as 'dynamic competencies'.

There is a special group of professionals, who every day, monitor, correct and update skills and the competency-base of organisations.

But has development of competencies been fully appreciated by most organisations?

The challenges are not over! The pace of change is increasing and the need for keeping skills relevant grows even more. Now is the time to recognise which organisations are at the forefront of change; which ones will develop dynamic competencies and actually lead the renewal of business life!

There is yet time to figure out what is critical for future success stories of organisations as a whole, and of the secretarial/admin profession in particular.

About the author

*Jari Kaivo-oja, Dr, Research Director,
Adjunct Professor, Finland Futures Research Centre, Turku School of Economics, University of Turku.*

Contact: jari.kaivooja@gmail.com; utu.fi/fi/yksikot/ffrc/Sivut/home.aspx



The future is here. Intelligent robots, self-driving cars, genetic editing, and the evidence of constant change is all around us and it's happening at an accelerated rate. It is time to re think our jobs and our positions in the workplace.

It is time to think about our career paths and how the future of technology impacts us, and whether we need to consider making changes.

For many of us it can feel impossible to truly safeguard our employability, especially when we can't be sure of how our current roles will change. We find ourselves asking which jobs will become obsolete and which new jobs will be created?

Getting ready to leave our comfort zone and flourish

“To stay relevant and prepare ourselves for the future a major shift is needed in our behaviour, mindset and skill-set!”

Think about the jobs that recruiters are now hiring for roles that were not in existence 10 years ago like App developers and Social Media Managers! It can be very daunting when we listen to all the talk in the media about how most of us will be working alongside robots in the future and we don't know exactly how that will all happen as yet. We ask ourselves how real the threat is and what the impact will be on the job market and our place in it.

Advances in technology have transformed the workplace, particularly when it comes to how we communicate amongst our fellow workers or management to subordinates. You can send emails, video chat, viber or even video conference through social media apps like WhatsApp and Skype. In terms of workplace dynamics this can often mean conversations that previously may have taken place in a meeting room are now moving online, which is more efficient and cost effective.

Technology has allowed us to balance our workloads differently, from working at home and being virtual assistants to video conferencing.

To stay relevant and prepare ourselves for the future a major shift is needed in our behaviour, mindset and skill-set!

We will have to look at how to stand out in the job market, by being aware of the need for soft skills like listening, communication and negotiation; and develop job-ready skills such as integrity and positive work ethic; stay on top of current trends by reading reports, journals, watching videos and participating in online discussions.

Say YES to new opportunities that push you out of your comfort zone, and become as widely adaptable and employable as possible.

The need for flexibility

It's important to be more flexible to working practices and to develop cultural intelligence. Any discipline that benefits from people skills like emotional intelligence, empathy and self-awareness are skills that robots cannot learn, and will therefore, be invaluable when one considers the human touch.

To stay relevant we will have to be prepared to adapt and aim to be different.

As Charles Darwin says *"It's not the strongest of the species that survives nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."*

To gain further insight into the challenges of the future, I was curious to find out what my colleagues thought about the role of the PA and how it would evolve.

I contacted Charlotte Human, a Senior PA at Norton Rose Fullbright Law firm (full interview questions with Charlotte in the ensuing pages) who felt that she was willing to embrace change and would "make peace" and accept the inevitable changes.

I also contacted a millennial PA, Diana Morais, who works for Advocates in the legal profession (full interview questions with Diana in the ensuing pages), and has a positive outlook and is excited but nervous, indicating a willingness to embrace technology and learn to change, adapt and evolve.

Both PAs, at different stages in their careers, were very positive and were willing to adapt.

Both also felt that communication was important and that companies would have a role in ensuring that they were ready by upskilling their workforce and adapting to the new way of doing business.

What was interesting to note was that Diana, true to the millennial way of thinking felt that she would want more flexibility for herself and family. She wanted a work life balance with flexible working hours coupled with more meaningful work and would job hop in search of that fulfilment.

As Diana says: "Millennial's are autonomous, they want to create their own world and have control over their own time and be independent".

In stark contrast to the positive attitudes expressed by the PAs, Professor Nel from Rhodes Business School (whom I also interviewed) had a more pessimistic outlook on the future of the PA.

STEM and the future

Professor Nel felt that technology would spell trouble for the profession and managers would need less dedicated PAs. He believes that unless the younger generation were upskilling or gaining new skills in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) field which he envisioned would become sought after skills in the future, they may not be able to compete in the job market and would ultimately be unemployable because like the factory worker, the administrative assistant and clerical worker their jobs would become obsolete.

Professor Nel hopes that more learning institutions will be able to offer more STEM qualifications.

When looking more closely at preparing for the future I think that those jobs that require complex social relationships, creativity and complex reasoning will be difficult to automate as opposed to those that require the least amount of education like cleaners and manual workers in construction or manufacturing.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

The impact of an industrial revolution

We are now facing the Fourth Industrial Revolution and as happened in previous industrial revolutions, mankind will learn new skills and adapt: while some jobs become obsolete, other jobs evolve as a result, and new jobs are created! The main difference now being that technology is evolving and impacting on our work at such a rapid pace.

I believe organisations will also have to adapt by anticipating change in working patterns because people now see themselves as “global citizens” and “pick up” new skills as they move around within, or beyond, continents.

I also believe the office support function has always evolved in accordance with work contexts. It is understandable to be concerned about the future and important to invest in skills for the long term, as Benjamin Franklin states: *“Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning!”*

Natalie Bassa Executive PA at G.U.D. She is a member of PAFSA's Academy of Excellence and is passionate about her profession, and for making a lasting and meaningful difference in the lives of others.

The Impact of the Industrial Revolutions

The First Industrial Revolution is widely taken to be the shift from our reliance on animals, human effort and biomass as primary sources of energy to the use of fossil fuels and the mechanical power this enabled.

The Second Industrial Revolution occurred between the end of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century, and brought major breakthroughs in the form of electricity distribution, both wireless and wired communication, the synthesis of ammonia and new forms of power generation.

The Third Industrial Revolution began in the 1950s with the development of digital systems, communication and rapid advances in computing power, which have enabled new ways of generating, processing and sharing information.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution involves entirely new capabilities for people and machines. While these capabilities are reliant on the technologies and infrastructure of the Third Industrial Revolution, the Fourth Industrial Revolution represents entirely new ways in which technology becomes embedded within societies and even our human bodies.

The complexity of these technologies and their emergent nature makes many aspects of the Fourth Industrial Revolution feel unfamiliar and, to many, threatening.

We should therefore remember that all industrial revolutions are ultimately driven by the individual and collective choices of people. And it is not just the choices of the researchers, inventors and designers developing the underlying technologies that matter, but even more importantly those of citizens who adopt and employ these technologies in daily life.

Martin Nowak, a professor at Harvard University, stated that cooperation is “the only thing that will redeem mankind”. If we have the courage to take collective responsibility for the changes underway, and the ability to work together to raise awareness and shape new narratives, we can embark on restructuring our economic, social and political systems to take full advantage of emerging technologies.

Source: World Economic Forum/ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/what-is-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/>

Q Charlotte, how do you imagine the PA role will evolve by the year 2025? What do you anticipate will change regarding the way we view work?

My greatest concern is the uncertainty of how my role will evolve and be defined. I have no problem working 'alongside bots' or other technology as long as it makes the process easier, and streamlines the work load.

I think the most important fact to embrace and make peace with, is that my role will definitely change. We will need guidance and support on the evolution of our roles and relevant training to support the requirements of these roles. It might be an idea to sponsor some revolutionary industry leading courses that can assist corporates in upskilling their staff. The manual type of work such as typing, photocopying, filing and invoicing will become automated. Our roles will need to change to provide a more supportive function, more interactive rather than administrative which will demand that we increase our interpersonal skills. Our ability to interrelate more effectively with clients and maintain good relationships with them to elicit payments and resolve queries will become critical.

What are your thoughts on the challenges ahead? What challenges are ahead for our executives and how can we help?

Technology will make the industry much more competitive and company strategies and outlooks will need to accommodate this. We will have to become more spontaneous and hands on. One of the challenges ahead will be how the executives anticipate and embrace the change in our roles as well as their own. Mindsets will need to shift to embrace technology and the way we do business. We will need to become more predictive and this will be determined by what extent our executives embrace this mind-shift and allow us to support them more comprehensively. The change in mindset and culture will be challenging for everyone at all levels in the corporation.

Communication will be key. Executives will need to facilitate regular meetings to discuss technological updates and communicate the proposed implications to our roles, and set boundaries and expectations in place. Without the understanding and discussion on both sides this will result in conflict and unhappiness in the workplace and loss of staff.

What are the uncertainties as well as the tools of hope according to your boss?

Constant communication, understanding of where the business is going and feeling secure in current positions; training to upskill and equip staff to take on new roles and embrace change; recognition and related remuneration; and generating a sense of understanding and belonging.

An interview with Charlotte Human



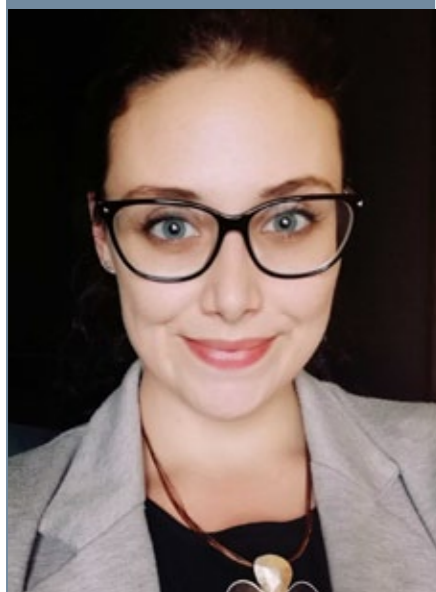
PA at Norton Rose
Fullbright Law firm

What scenarios does your boss/company envisage for the next decade?

Streamlining operations; streamlining processes to become cheaper and faster; looking at bigger margins; retaining workforce; and developing a competitive edge and better service levels to retain clients and ensure satisfaction.

An interview
with

Diana Morais



At the time of the
interview, was PA to Adv
Benny Makola and Adv
Tembeka Ngcukaitobi

Q *Diana, how do you imagine the PA role will evolve by the year 2025? What do you anticipate will change regarding the way we view work?*

As PAs we need to be open to developing new skills NOW! With the development of technology such as cloud-based apps, AI, bots, internet, 3D printing, block chain technology and biometric technology, PAs have a lot of information to learn and retain by 2025.

PAs are required to be “know-it-all’s”. Our executives need to be able to rely on us should something go amiss. With new technology, there is a lot more room for PAs to develop our own skills.

I am quite excited and quite nervous to be working alongside bots. On the one hand there is the fear that bots will replace humans but I do not believe this will happen because bots are not able to predict things in the way that PAs are able to anticipate events or situations. Bots may be more efficient but, for now at least, they are unable to foresee events.

Millennials need to be open to embracing new technology and all the skills and issues that come with modern technology. We need to be patient and willing to learn and understand new machines that are developed as well as the issues it will come along with it so that we can effectively manage problems and even anticipate issues.

We need to focus on autonomy to ensure productivity, accountability (although with biometric technology I highly doubt our fingerprints or irises will lie!), communication, trust, flexibility in adapting to new technology, creativeness in problem-solving with new issues arising and, finally, patience (lots and lots of patience).

As exciting as all this change and new technology is, for the younger generation like millennials, I can understand how it might be daunting for the current or older generation.

Millennial PAs need to be open to helping the PAs around them, and encourage their executives to adapt to the new technology. We do have the odd occasion where the executive will turn up at work with a new invention that the PA will need to quickly download a manual and start studying! Many permanent PAs are being replaced and freelancers, known as Virtual Assistants (VAs), are being taken on for ad hoc work that Advocates do not have the capacity to do. This shows the millennial impact on the PA industry.

Many millennials want more time for themselves, more flexibility, more time for their family and this is what is provided when you are a VA. This role will drastically change as and when technology changes and is implemented.

What are your thoughts on the challenges ahead? What challenges are ahead for our executives and how can we help? What are the uncertainties as well as the tools of hope?

I imagine that most executives want their PAs to be available and flexible to work as, and when required. Many jobs these days require PAs to travel with their executives and to work on weekends. With millennials this may prove to be a problem because millennials are known for being loyal to themselves and themselves alone.

Many millennials are not scared to “job-hop” and they usually seek an environment that provides meaningful work. Should they not feel that their work is meaningful, they leave.

We all need to learn to maintain a work-life balance. When at work, we need to be focussed on work and to ensure that our executives can be at the top of their game. If there is mutual respect then I believe that professional relationships will work.

As mentioned, they need flexibility and adaptability; we need to be open-minded to the new changes around us.

Tools of hope: Technology can be highly beneficial to PAs and advocates as they are useful and allow executives access to assistance when they cannot access their PA.

Uncertainties: Millennials are autonomous – they want to create their own world and have control over their own time and be independent.

What scenarios do you envisage for the next decade?

A large part of legal work is typing via dictation; and Advocates and legal professionals alike use dictaphones. Technology has already been developed to overrule dictaphones, being speech software. Typists type at a speed between 70 and 120 words per minute (that I know of) and we talk at an average rate of 110 to 150 words per minute.

Already you can see the efficiency of the speech recognition software. However, (placing much emphasis here) this software does not have the kind of efficiency

“ Millennial PAs need to be open to helping the PAs around them, and encourage their executives to adapt to the new technology. ”

that PAs have: it does not format or recognise Latin for example and at the moment the speech recognition software has to be trained for a couple of weeks to be able to pick up one’s manner of talking whereas a typist can type without being trained to recognise a voice.

Essentially, the legal professionals still need someone to format and proof-read the documents once they have been typed whereas a typist does this automatically. In the future, this concept may change, however I believe that in the next ten years, technology will still not be able to use the discretion that a PA has.

At the time of the interview, Personal Assistant to Adv Benny Makola and Adv Tembeka Ngcukaitobi; Diana is now Executive Assistant to CEO and CFO at Teljoy.

“As technology drives down the cost of doing business, the role of traditional human work is changing rapidly.”

Q Professor Nel, how do you imagine the PA role will evolve by the year 2025?

Let me start with this: Soon humans stand to be superfluous at hotels. No more receptionists to manage the check-in and check-out routines of the past. The friendly porter robot delivers your luggage to the room. The future for humans working at hotels seems bleak, they are about to be replaced by robots. The big advantage to guests is cheaper room rates.

At Amazon workers in the massive warehouses had lots of hard work to do during the start-up years. Replenishing the stock holding bins was all part of long 10-hour shifts. Not anymore, robots do that now. As customers relentlessly order books, music and gadgets online 24/7, the Amazon robots rush to the bins, collect items and ship to the customers.

Amazon calls this automation! As technology drives down the cost of doing business, the role of traditional human work is changing rapidly; workers will need to find new roles to stay employed.

With so many digital assistants to the disposal of managers and the increased use of virtual offices, with new technology making human work more and more redundant, the role of the secretary/admin support/PA job needs to change. If we study the above trends, managers will need less dedicated PA services in the future.

What do you anticipate will change regarding the way we view work?

This question assumes that the PA will have the traditional support role to the executive. What happens if technology replaces the PA role by using robots? What happens when layers of managers are replaced by technology? As managers get replaced by technology so there will be less PAs required, and soft skills maybe just not be so crucial anymore.

New emerging technologies spell trouble for workers in administrative or clerical roles. The need for a human to schedule meetings, read and write emails or taking notes are fast disappearing. Artificial intelligence software can read documents and write articles or opinions or even post the creative work to the company website for the few remaining workers to read.

The future seems to be higher productivity driven by technology and therefore fewer jobs for humans, and there is ample evidence that the traditional PA role will be affected by this trend.

What challenges are ahead for our executives and how can we help?

Senior leadership in large organisations need to start thinking about

resource-based theory a lot. Basically starting to think how the allocation of resources needs to change in a world of increasing automation and how that contributes to the long-term competitiveness of the current firm.

If a significant number of humans are to be replaced by machines, what work will the humans do? As technological disruption gains pace over next ten years, highly skilled workers with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) qualifications will continue to be a scarce resource. Senior executives will be attracting highly skilled workers that can work in an AI, Data Science, and Algorithm enabled workplace to ensure the continued relevance of their products and service offering.

The pool of available highly skilled labour that can fulfil these demanding new roles is likely to remain small. There are those workers who will succumb to the technological innovation, and those who benefit from a STEM based qualification.

The PAs who survive will be tech-savvy workers who can teach machines who assist busy executives.

What are the uncertainties as well as the tools of hope?

As automation significantly takes over, the great uncertainty for many workers will be how to put food on the table. Note this: If you live in the Nordic countries there is hope, the social security net takes care of those who cannot work due to dated workplace skills.

For the younger worker, including the future 'PA', there is the option of gaining new skills to compete in the high tech world.

What scenarios do you envisage regarding skills and education?

There is a lot being said about IoT or the Internet of Things. This has led to the development of self-driving cars, automated homes and digital devices that are filled with sensors connected to the Web.

All these digital connections create streams of data. This creates work for data scientists doing "Big Data Analytics" to sift through large datasets that predicts our next purchase.

Learning institutions that offer competitive courses in computer science, statistics, mathematics, technological innovation and digital business transformation would do well.

Workers sitting at a desk, factory workers doing repetitive tasks or anybody using a vehicle for work should be worried, the robots are here.

Prepare now.

An interview with

Prof. Deon Nel



Prof Deon Nel is Professor of Marketing at Rhodes Business School.

Flexible wizards will always survive!

An EA / PA will not necessarily need a fixed/local workstation, but can work independently of location and adjust the amount of work to the actual work required, whereas nowadays office workers are mostly tied to fixed working hours.

Not every workspace has the same amount of work over the period of a year. Therefore, it would be conceivable to have different assistants for different work areas, which in themselves could be used for several employers and thus could compensate for times when less work is required.

The future PAs, 'Flexible wizards' will thus save not only resources, but also expenses.

For tasks that do not require social or emotional intelligence, artificial intelligence such as X.AI, Alexa & Co. are already an alternative tool.

Tasks for which social intelligence and emotional choices are fundamental will, in my opinion, continue to be part of human work at least for another five years.

The challenges for EAs/PAs are the development of efficient communication pathways/ strategies that enable the EA/PA to have all the information required, regardless of time and place.

It significantly affects the efficiency of an EA/PA to have to regularly give a lot of continuous information on new work orders - this raises the question of a cloud system, which by 2025 will have gained considerably in terms of security, reliability and practicability, and should be able to present the current state of affairs to all employees working on a task in real time.

Consequently, there is a need to be able to make updates and work progress available to others in a time-saving manner.

In my opinion, the uncertainties that can arise will be regarding the compatibility of different software systems. The consequences of incompatible software systems can have far-reaching consequences.

Another aspect that should not be ignored is competition with Predictive AI.

However, the human PA can survive at least for some more years because of the skills that can surpass the software/PA. That is where we should be concentrating: On opening the hearts and minds of the PA to be receptive to the opportunities that lie ahead.

Christopher Patrick Peterka is a futurist and managing partner of the gannaca global think tank group.

Contact: peterka@gannaca.com; gannaca.com

Chapter 2

You can do what I cannot do.
I can do what you cannot do.
Together we can do
great things.
- Mother Teresa

Preparing yourself for the year 2025:

MEETING THE EXECUTIVE'S EXPECTATIONS

Featuring:

FOREWORD by futurist Charles Brass (Australia)

ANCHOR FEATURE by futurist Biraj Naidoo (UAE)

OPINION PIECE by author Jan Jones (USA)

FOCUS FEATURE by PA, Nadia Williams-Mabaso, finalist in South Africa's PA of the Year 2017. She also interviews:

- Karen Bonhomme, PA, Agribusiness Development Agency
- Yolisa Bethela, PA, Sanlam Multi Manager
- An expert: Rechi Dlamini, (MBA), Acting Chief Operations Officer, Agribusiness Development Agency

Last Word by futurist Jim Carroll (Canada)

Those executives smart enough to realise the value of continuing to employ an assistant (and too many are not – incorrectly believing that technology and the occasional psych session are all they need) recognise that today's executive assistant is performing tasks that are of greater organisational significance than they were just a few decades ago.

The EA or PA heads for greater organisational significance

All jobs involve elements that are more menial than others. Until very recently, for example, the time taken to verbalise a communication was much less than the time taken to turn it into a format that could be more widely communicated, and once the communication was initially created it was more cost effective to have the leader move onto other matters than to have them type it up and distribute it themselves.

Over the past twenty years this has changed. It now takes no longer to send an email or a video than it takes to compose it in the first place.

This is just one example of the impact that technology has had on operations inside all companies and, in particular, on the role of the executive and their executive assistant.

The EA in the modern era

In an era where the assistant largely undertook tasks that, while been absolutely necessary, were clearly subordinate, the hierarchical distance between the assistant and the executive was quite large.

In the modern era where technology now puts information and action directly in the hands of the executive, the assistant's role has changed significantly.

All sorts of resources are now available to enhance the competence of modern executives:

- Computer technology makes it easier to communicate with, monitor and manage employees;
- Information technology (including so-called digital assistants) makes it possible to collect and analyse critical data in almost real time; and
- Psychologists and life coaches are available to help executives reflect on how things are going and help them manage stress.

Each of these, however, lacks a crucial component that can be brought to the executive only by a competent assistant. Technology lacks an understanding of the context within which it operates, and executive coaches are not embedded within organisations and can only be of assistance in retrospect.

The same technology that has enhanced the executive has also liberated their assistant!

The Executive Assistant is hired to enhance the capacity of the executives to do their job. Historically this might have been described as giving the executive extra eyes, ears, arms and legs; but increasingly it means giving them an extra heart and brain.



The foreseeable future

This change reflects changes taking place in all areas of work. Until relatively recently human arms, legs, ears and eyes were the most effective tools we had at our disposal. Nowadays robotic arms and legs are stronger and more flexible than human ones, and robots can see at least as well as we can.

Where artificial technology, however, still lags well behind human capability is in thinking and feeling, and it is here that the human executive assistant still plays a critical role, and despite the promises of artificial intelligence, the role will probably continue to be necessary for the foreseeable future.

Executive assistants have always been gatekeepers for their executive's attention. Increasingly they are expanding the range of this attention by using their heart

and brain to 'take the temperature' of the environment surrounding the executive, and advise them accordingly.

In this way the office resembles the family. While it is clearly possible for a single parent to raise children, there is also no doubt that the process is easier and the results better when two competent parents are involved.

This then, is the direction in which the executive assistant role is expanding, moving from being a subordinate assistant towards becoming a competent partner.

About the author

Charles Brass (Australia)
Chairman at Futures Foundation

Contact: cab@fowf.com.au; futuresfoundation.org.au

EAs will shift roles from task-based to value-based!



Good decisions are also based on intuition. If Executive Assistants are able to use their intuition to make decisions that add value to their company or their clients then any Executive would want to have them as their right hand.

The main question is: Why should executives have a qualified assistant?
For me, the three obvious reasons are:

1. A good Executive Assistant is like a strong right hand to any Executive.
2. To bounce off ideas and get second opinions.
3. To free up time & energy so that the Executive can focus on clients & company deliverables.

But the fourth, and perhaps not-so-obvious, reason is actually the key one:

4. To complement the Executive's weaknesses and enhance their strengths.

Let's consider some risks to the profession of the PA/EA in current digital age. Many young professionals don't consider becoming a PA when planning a career.

I would assume that a number of young people are not likely to say: "I want to become an executive assistant when I grow up".

Furthermore, automation and virtual assistants can replace traditional task based activities. And the essential question to be asked is: For how long can the qualifications in becoming an Executive Assistant stay current?

Just as there are risks we need to consider, so are there opportunities. For example, if the Executive Assistant is able to shift his/her job from task-based to value-based, then no technology can replace him/her.

My verdict is that the future of the Executive Assistant is threatened by AI, machine learning, the Internet of Things (IoT) and virtual assistants.

However, I believe that a strong leader would still depend on a competent assistant no matter how far technology advances, because any machine can execute tasks but only few people can make decisions, based on intuition that adds value.

An Executive Assistant would not be able to crunch numbers and run tasks as effectively as a Virtual Assistant but he/she can make a decision in the absence of the Executive that adds value and is based on intuition & contextual understanding of the business environment or client landscape.

About the author

Biraj Naidoo (UAE) is Regional Director at The Training Room Online; also a keynote speaker on learning technology trends; how humans consume information and future learning technology.

Contact: biraj@ttr.com; kalleo.com

Studies and experts agree: AI = Human and Machine. While there will be short-term displacement in some sectors, humans will be empowered by AI. What will happen in the EA profession, like other professions, is that assistants will need to re-skill in order to prepare themselves to work with AI and to take advantage of the new opportunities that will open up. I'm excited by this news because AI will re-vitalise the EA role.

The work relationship between boss and EA in the future

Let me tell you a story that I've shared in my book, *"The CEO's Secret Weapon."* A CEO overheard that I was writing a book and asked me what it was about. When I told him, he haughtily proclaimed that someday computers would replace assistants. I replied that would happen the day computers replace the CEO.

That incident took place many years ago and computers have not yet replaced executive assistants. Because the misunderstanding about the role of the executive assistant is widespread, people like that CEO have been predicting that the position will become obsolete. If only they knew that there exists a category of assistants who are resourceful go-getters, who facilitate the pace and standard for high performance in their organisations. Without these assistants, high-powered CEOs would be buried in minutiae that would distract them from overseeing the strategic direction and performance of their organisation. Going forward, if more assistants step up their game to make themselves an integral part of the business partnership with their executive, the role is poised to remain vital.

High-functioning executive assistants are in little-to-no danger of being replaced by automation. Instead, high-

level assistants will be using AI as their assistants, to increase productivity.

Studies and experts agree: AI = Human and Machine. While there will be short-term displacement in some sectors, humans will be empowered by AI. What will happen in the EA profession, like other professions, is that assistants will need to re-skill in order to prepare themselves to work with AI and to take advantage of the new opportunities that will open up. With AI taking on mundane tasks, assistants can expand their roles and become an even more potent resource for their executives.

I'm excited by the fact that AI will re-vitalise the EA role.

Many assistants have stopped bringing enthusiasm and inspired thinking to their jobs. They've fallen prey to mediocrity and are not fully engaged. These are the assistants who will be in danger of losing their job when companies start to automate routine tasks.

Genpact Research Institute estimates that only 38% of businesses are offering training and re-skilling programmes. To avoid being downsized, assistants must become pro-active.



Talk to your boss to determine what aspects of your job are most vital to them and the company. What skills should you develop for the future?

Find ways to enhance your skills in those areas. Identify for your boss what resources you both may require to thrive in an AI workplace. Show them you are willing to learn new skills and take on new challenges.

Discuss the benefits to your boss of you increasing your skills, particularly your critical and strategic thinking skills, communication, project management and leadership skills. If your company won't pay for your training, then you find ways to pay for it yourself. Make a deal with your executive that if they see noticeable improvement in your performance, the company will reimburse your tuition.

Less optimistic than my forecast is the PwC UK Economic Outlook 2017. The Report estimates that Administrative and Support Services are in the category of "greatest potential risk for automation in the UK", estimating that by 2030, 37% of UK jobs in this category are at risk. Conversely, the same PwC report shows that in the US, less than 2% of Administrative and Support positions are at risk.

As an assistant, you know where you fall on the scale of low, medium or high level executive assistant. While top management may be slow to integrate AI into business, automation is coming. Don't be apathetic and don't think it won't happen to you.

If the bulk of your job consists of repetitive tasks that can be done faster by a machine, eventually it will. You need to head it off. Use this interim time to up-skill and increase your value to your organisation.

I assert emphatically that if you are a top-performing executive assistant with what I call "intangible" or soft skills that you utilise effectively in your job, you are at a low risk of being automated. Don't just take my word for it. The often-cited study "The Future of Employment", undertaken by Frey & Osborne states, "Occupations that involve complex perception, creative intelligence tasks, and social intelligence tasks are unlikely to be substituted by computer capital over the next decade or two. While robots will take over repetitive tasks, certain actions will remain out of range of automation."

Those actions include the intangible traits that make you a next-level assistant such as resourcefulness, initiative, empathy, relationship building, humour, diplomacy, adaptability, resilience, sensing your boss' mood, and reflecting your boss' values. These are exactly the core skills that executive assistants must bring to the working relationship with their executive in order to develop a dynamic alliance and make themselves a long-lasting, invaluable part of the business equation, which no AI can match and no executive would ever relinquish.

About the author

Jan Jones is the author of *"The CEO's Secret Weapon How Great Leaders and Their Assistants Maximise Productivity and Effectiveness"* which debuted at #1 on Amazon's Hot New Releases in the Office Management category. It has received widespread acclaim from executives and executive assistants worldwide. Jan spent twenty years as a distinguished executive assistant to successful business people around the world.

Contact: Jan Jones jan@theceossecretweapon.com;
www.theceossecretweapon.com
© Jan Jones 2018. All Rights Reserved.



In this Blueprint we will read much about how the future is going to impact on our role as PAs. In this particular chapter you will come across views and perspectives on our role with regard to preparing for the future executive.

The future executive expects a Super-PA

With more and more technology skills being in demand, it will basically boil down to managers being able to manage employees, resources, clients and the office using this updated technology.

Technology will allow the executive more flexibility, working from any location with any data and device will be the new normal. This means that executives can interact through video calls in lieu of attending meetings, workshops and conferences. They can even hold staff meetings without being in the office. This is possible through the latest 3D video conferencing facilities, which even allows for documents and presentations to be projected for all to see. It would mean less travelling and more available work time, but more importantly, huge savings on traveling expenses.

It is predicted that office space will be smaller, desk space definitely minimised, no more filling cabinets and good bye to hand held phones. Yes, it will definitely be costly to upgrade technology as devices need to be purchased, systems installed and managed, but companies will potentially be saving on some of the obvious day-to-day expenses such as stationery items, volumes of paper, furniture, rental and other supplies.

The future workplace will be so connected and intelligent that managers wouldn't have to leave their beds to run to the office.

However, the biggest drawback of technology is the issue of viruses and hackers. Data security will be very important as company networks will be handling more devices, information and systems. Well defined processes and procedures will need to be put in place and complied with to ensure the safety and integrity of data and information.

Adequate and consistent training will be required to keep the executive in the know. This can be achieved through making use of videos and online

courses, all available anywhere, anytime and on any device. What the new technologies will accomplish, is in giving the executive more time to spend with the family, go on holidays, be active at the gym or just laze around doing nothing. In fact, in the future, going to the office everyday will be a thing of the past.

What an amazing change it will be for the executive and for us as PAs!

The needs for having a back-up (PA) will be different to today's needs.

The World Economic Forum's 2016 report stated in 'The Future of Jobs', that five million jobs will be lost to automation by 2020 and that the number will keep growing. Jobs that once seemed like "safe bets" – office workers and administrative personnel, manufacturing, and even law – will be hit hardest, the report estimates.

The life of a PA involves a lot of work which takes a lot of time, especially since administrative work is not always straight forward. The daily tasks performed by a human PA in the future will be focussed on taking the pressure off their executive and making their life easier, less cluttered and productive. It's safe to say that every executive will still need a super-PA.

The future will change the role as technology will take over most duties.

The PA will be able to work from anywhere at any time. There will be no need for a laptop or computer, as hologram screens will be available and keyboards will be a projection onto any flat surface. Paper will be a thing of the past and so the dreaded monster called "filling" is expected to disappear giving way to a paperless future.

People will not need to be at one venue in order to have a meeting, 3D hologram screens will be able to connect everyone and also make it possible to retrieve and view documents, presentations and pictures. Calls will be routed directly to cell phones causing office phones to become extinct. Devices will be able to send out meeting requests and the agenda to stakeholders using just voice activation. It will also capture and track attendees, record and at the same time transcribe and send minutes to all parties without the PA having to lift a finger or even be at the meeting.

Long gone will be recording of minutes, typing then editing, reviewing and emailing which takes hours and sometimes days to complete.

Working from home or a shared office space will be the norm, as the PA will be giving instructions to technology to perform tasks and reporting on completion.

Companies will likely require PAs to do more than one job, and report to more than one manager as projects will be completed within shorter periods. It may even be possible for the PA to service more than one company or branch simultaneously just so that there is adequate work. The need for a PA will definitely be different to today's needs, and the PA may need to look for alternative sources of income.

It is imperative that PAs acquire new skills, strategies and levels of education which will help them thrive in future work environments. Attending training and workshops is also vital for growth but, more importantly, is the embracing of change, having a positive attitude and a passion for learning new things. This will ensure that the PA is able to adapt to the future world of work and secure employment.

It cannot be denied that technology will cause many jobs to be phased out but one thing for sure is that there will always be a need for a human touch, as robots will not possess soft skills, like social and emotional intelligence and cultural competency.

When it comes to our executives, obviously we need to meet their expectations by keeping up with them. Clearly this means ensuring we keep upskilling ourselves and even better, staying alert to what's happening in the world of work and being ahead of the game.

It's true – knowledge is power.

In preparing for this chapter, I interviewed three people who have given very interesting inputs on the subject. The interviews follow this article.

Nadia Williams-Mabaso is PA at the Agribusiness Development Agency. She is a member of PAFSA's Academy of Excellence, and is currently studying towards a BCOM Financial Management and a Diploma in Business Management. Her passion has always been to manage and make her work fun.

“It cannot be denied that technology will cause many jobs to be phased out, but one thing for sure is that there will always be a need for a human touch!”

An interview
with

Karen Bonhomme



Senior PA at
Agribusiness
Development Agency

Q *How do YOU imagine our role to be around the year 2025? What do you fear, hope, anticipate will change?*

We are fast approaching a new era of the Data Age which includes the evolution of Personal Assistants. This is from autonomous cars to humanoid robots and from intelligent personal assistants to smart home devices, the world around us is undergoing a fundamental change, transforming the way we live, work, and play.

Imagine being awoken and tended to by a virtual personal assistant that advises you on what clothing from your wardrobe is best suited to the weather report and your schedule for the day or being transported by your self-driven car. Or perhaps you won't need to commute to an office at all as technology will allow you to conjure workspaces out of thin air using interactive surfaces, and holographic teleconferencing becomes the norm for communicating virtually with colleagues.

I see many of our tasks being replaced by virtual assistants and hence our role, as it is today, not being applicable in the future. What I fear is that we could potentially be replaced by androids, technology and virtual assistants.

I anticipate that the need for many current tasks of PAs will always be required to be done but not by human 'hands'. We already see this in the new Smart Pens which are designed to capture what we are writing and place into a word document.

However, I hope that the human factor of what we bring to this position will still be a part of this technological era, as this position requires a certain amount of human support in terms of providing the support which a machine cannot.

What are your thoughts on the challenges ahead? What are the uncertainties as well as the tools of hope according to your boss?

To meet the challenges that lie ahead for me, if I choose to remain in this role, I may need to bear in mind that much of what I am doing now can soon be outsourced to a faster, newer, better looking model.

My thoughts are that I may need to focus my career in another direction. Still remain within administration but perhaps at a higher level. I may also need to ensure that I am kept updated with the new technology and the needs of my Executive. Senior managers are uncertain if there will really be a need for me. The only hope offered is that of broadening my knowledge of technology and evolving my career. My manager loves the human factor and although he is aware of the revolutionary change in our positions he feels that he will always need the human side of a PA, and not just the technology factor.

What scenarios does your boss/company envisage in terms of how people can remain relevant in the face of invading automation and Artificial Intelligence?

People who will always remain relevant form part of the IT arena. Even with a change in technology someone will always be needed to update the information or technology being used.

Staying relevant is becoming increasingly difficult; the more technology advances, the faster it moves. It connects us to everything, and work/life balance is fast becoming a myth.

Our office is working, even when we aren't!

“ I hope that the human factor of what we bring to this position will still be a part of this technological era. ”

In the
words of

Niall Dunne

"When the World Economic Forum surveyed global HR decision-makers, some 44% pointed to new technologies enabling remote working, co-working space and teleconferencing as the principal driver of change.

Concurrently, advances in mobile and cloud technology allowing remote and instant access were singled out as the most important technological driver of change, enabling the rapid spread of internet-based service models.

It's worth reflecting on how we could imagine a changed world like this!

Our future place of work might not be an open plan office, but interconnected workspaces not tied to one place, but many. They will be underpinned by virtual conferencing, complete and constant connection and portability.

Our working day will be fundamentally different. Leveraging big data, like real-time traffic information, could cut journey times, making the school run easier, and the morning commute more manageable. That is, if you have to commute: home-working will no longer be defined as a Friday luxury, but a more efficient way to work enabled by technology, taking the physical strain from megacities and regionalising work locations."

An interview
with

Yolisa
Bethela



PA at
Sanlam Multi Manager

Q *As technology takes over our offices, has it disrupted your workplace and the way you work?*

On the contrary I think that technology has helped us tremendously with having access to Video conferencing, Instant Messaging, the advancement of Microsoft Windows, online booking systems, smartphones, etc. By using technology we are able to save time and money.

If you think back to 10 years ago before WhatsApp, if you needed to get an urgent message through to your executive that might affect the outcome of a meeting or a decision, the only option would have been to leave a voicemail message or send a text and hope for the best. However in 2018 we have WhatsApp – a cheap and effective way to ensure that they not only get the message but you're also able to see whether or not your message has been read. If the message has remained unopened you can bring it to your executive's attention by using the 'ping' function (a kind of electronic nudge) to ensure that they respond quickly and advise you in terms of what you need to prepare. An application as simple as that can have such a huge impact on the level of service that you bring, however I have to stress that your "terms of engagement" has to be agreed beforehand with your executive. This is not to say that I do not run into the occasional system 'gremlins' with connectivity issues and such but in general I feel that technology helps me maximise my efficiency.

How much has technology affected the way you and your boss work as a team?

I have been fortunate in that I work with executives and a team who are relatively young and as a whole we embrace technology. We have a chat group where ideas on industry-related topics are shared regularly. This not only alerts you to world trends but I have found that this easy exchange of ideas and information has helped our Portfolio Managers in preparing for client meetings and given them foresight into what tough questions could be asked. We also use the chat group as a way to stay in touch when travelling. On the lighter side of things it has also taken on a more social side as opposed to being just for work and we use the chat group to celebrate team "wins", personal announcements, sharing quirky creative ideas, and general well wishes. I feel this successfully highlights our interconnectedness and technology has played a huge part in helping us function well as a team.

How do you see yourself preparing for the future in terms of what the new demands of your boss will be as technology invades more and more?

This question is perhaps the one that causes a bit of dread in my heart,

with the arrival of robotics, automation is becoming a reality and it's not just science fiction. These are said to boost productivity and convenience and will undoubtedly change the workplace and how we work.

Being in the financial services industry I hope that automation will translate to less human error and in so doing will allow more time for idea generating and this will mean that I will also need to adapt, upskill myself and effectively change my role within the team.

In your opinion, do you see yourself, as well as executives, in the future having to be 'connected' 24x7?

I mentioned previously that as a team we have a chat group which we use as an effective tool to share ideas and alert each other of any changes, but I feel that as a team we have defined boundaries about interacting after hours. It is only on the rare occasion where my executive will request a last minute change where I might need to log on to make that change then I will do so.

With the arrival of robotics in the workplace this will mean that, even though we have more time - and systems are more efficient - our turnaround times in terms of response to queries or even emails will become shorter and we will need to be more connected in terms of work.

I'd like to add that as more and more people have one or two different jobs one will need to be connected 24x7.

If we look at programs like Instagram, Twitter, Snap Chat these allow you to build a personal brand as you are connected all the time, not from the aspect of reading emails and having to work, but more on a lighter note so much so that you do not even consider it work.

If you take into consideration the time it takes to make that lovely salad or gourmet dish, and the time it takes to take the perfect picture from the perfect angle and sharing it online with your followers – is this not being connected 24x7 or sharing your life with the world it is without the pressures of having to be deadline orientated, but you are connected 24x7.

“ Being in the financial services industry I hope that automation will translate to less human error and in so doing will allow more time for idea generating and this will mean that I will also need to adapt, upskill myself and effectively change my role within the team. ”

An interview with

Rechi Dlamini



Ms Rechi Dlamini (MBA) is the Acting Chief Operations Officer, Agribusiness Development Agency

Q *What do you anticipate will change? What challenges do you envision are ahead?*

In Richards Bay the traffic light system has already been integrated to a control centre which allows for changes to the timing of the lights to ease congestion that arises randomly. In the past, it would have necessitated that a traffic policeman realises the challenge before driving to the scene by which time the traffic would have built up even more. This means that less traffic police shall be required in future once the technology reaches other cities.

Technology presents the opportunity of having the back up of a virtual assistant that may not even be in the same province where the office operates, allowing for flexi time for the personal assistant that arrives physically at the premises. On deciding to leave early, the regular PA would re-route calls and emails to a virtual assistant. As technology develops even further the need for the virtual assistant may even fall away.

Continuous improvement and responsiveness are the only way that personal assistants can remain relevant in the future.

As technology takes over more and more tasks, a person has to strengthen the skills that cannot be replicated by a robot or machine. It is imperative that support staff keep abreast of technological developments in order to assist the executive make informed decisions. Further to the same, to prepare for the new innovations and reduce the uncertainties that could arise.

In keeping abreast of new developments, the personal assistant can prepare mentally for what is to come. To be prepared, the personal assistant needs to be reading and learning more frequently than before. It will not always be possible for the employer to provide the required training so it's important to take ownership of our professional development.

What are the uncertainties as well as the tools of hope?

One uncertainty that technology brings with it is the reduced job security. The personal assistant cannot expect the job to remain what it was ten years ago. In the past, the executive may have spent more time in the office but could be spending more time on the road. Once the business executive spends more time on the road, it is important for the personal assistant to streamline processes in the offices to respond to the needs of the executive on the move. One of the responses includes changes to flight times at short notice, scanning and dispatching of documents in short shift. All of this relates back to responsiveness.

What scenarios do you envisage?

I envisage one scenario where Personal Assistants spend less direct contact time with their executive, and yet the work load increases exponentially!

Although, the assistant may wish to push for increased remuneration, this needs to be balanced with ensuring the sustainability of the business. The demands for increased pay should be coupled with evidence of increased revenue brought in by the person demanding more pay.

The advent of technology presents new work opportunities for personnel to fix and maintain the robots, etc. The personal assistant with sufficient science-based skills could transition into a career linked to robotics.

Another scenario is of changing roles as the business moves technologically. The changing roles may require re-training of the personal assistant.

Although the nice to have is for the employer to fund the training, individuals may have to fund their own training in order to remain relevant to their job.

“ I envisage one scenario where PAs spend less direct contact time with their executive, and yet the work load increases exponentially! ”

In the words of

Thomas L. Friedman

“ When machines and software control more and more of our lives, people will seek out more human-to-human connections - all the things you can't download but have to upload the old-fashioned way, one human to another.”

Long live the 'right-hand' who knows your mind

Ana-Maria Valente asked me for my thoughts, as a futurist who studies future trends in every type of industry, on the future role of the EA, in the era of fast trends, artificial intelligence and more. I really don't think that I'm qualified to answer this question, since I've been working in a small home office for 28 years. In that context, I'm doing so in a rather unique situation – my wife and business partner joined in working with me in this home office 25 years ago.

How can I possibly conceptualise on the future role of the EA when I don't really work in a typical office or corporate organisation?

Maybe because my wife has also somehow become my EA through the years, and somehow she manages to keep my role of advising organisations worldwide as to the impact of the future trends on an even keel.

Let's first put into perspective the nature of our office.

I quit my job with a global accounting firm 30 years ago, in order to focus on providing people with insight into future trends and innovation. Five years in, we had our first son, my career as a futurist and speaker was taking off – and the path forward seemed clear: My wife would quit her job and join me in the office at home. This was not an easy decision – she had a wonderful and remarkable career ahead of her. She was the Controller and Director of Taxation for a large, global multinational, with a staff of 30 under her direct command. And yet she missed her infant son when she headed out to work each day, I was falling hopelessly behind

on staying organised department, and to fix this we faced spending money into setting up a proper office or choose to work from home, together, and improve the home office setup.

Fast forward 25 years.

She's next to me in our home office right now. She travels with me to each of my events, whether in Nebraska, Tokyo, Dubai or London.

Ours is a pretty complex operation – there are multiple contracts that need to be negotiated, finalised and pursued, and I really don't have the patience for this. The travel schedules get pretty complex, with stage and sound checks, multiple planning conference calls, and other details that float by me (and again, which I do not have the patience for!). There are reports to be generated, books to be edited, video production schedules to be coordinated, and financial, taxation and accounting matters to be managed. She has taken on all of these roles – and I could not imagine doing this in any other way.

And so while many of us sit back and wonder about a future of AI, robots and other scary trends, I'm a big believer that if you have someone at your right hand who knows your mind, your activities, the way you work and what needs to be done – and who can anticipate your every activity – then you can achieve your key role with stunning success!

About the Author

Jim Carroll is a global futurist, trends and innovation expert.

Contact: jcarroll@jimcarroll.com; jimcarroll.com

Chapter 3

The world as we have created it
is a process of our thinking.
It cannot be changed
without changing our thinking.

– Albert Einstein

Preparing yourself for the year 2025:

THE NEW-LOOK ORGANISATION

Featuring:

FOREWORD by futurist Graeme Codrington (SA/UK)

ANCHOR FEATURE by futurist Daniel Burrus (USA)

OPINION PIECE by Mark Dixon, Founder and CEO of IWG Plc.

FOCUS FEATURE by PA, Milicent Chanetsa, finalist in South Africa's PA of the Year 2017. She also interviews:

- Carine Daniels, South Africa's PA of the Year 2016
- Sonja Bohländer, senior PA, at Sasol
- Arthur Goldstuck, Tech expert, World Wide Worx (SA)

LAST WORD by Erica Volini and Garth Andrus



As a futurist, it's my business to look into the future and think about how it's going to affect the way that we live our lives, the way that we work at our offices, and the way that society functions. However, I also realise that for most people, peering this far ahead just doesn't happen. It takes enough to just focus on the present or perhaps the week ahead in our increasingly hectic lives.

For businesses though, it certainly isn't too soon to start thinking about the future. Preparations need to start now!

That's because employees are expecting more from the technology that they use. You can already see the growing divergence between the technology that people are used to using in their homes to communicate with their friends, do their shopping, and watch TV, and those that they use during the working day.

Currently some businesses are failing to lead the way with the technology that their employees are accustomed to using, and that they know they will need as the ways of collaborating and working become more technologically complex.

By 2025, most businesses will have a new generation of employees that expect even more from their workplace technology. They'll also be working in a world where teams are more diverse and geographically dispersed.

Some may also find themselves working alongside robots and early forms of artificial intelligence. All of these things require stable infrastructure and reliable internet connections.

However, you don't need to look to 2025 to see how important reliable and stable technology is to be able to use the latest tech in the workplace.

To remain competitive, organisations must begin to prepare for how work will change as a result of emerging technologies.

Most of us wouldn't think twice before FaceTime-ing our family in Australia, or sending a Whatsapp to your best friend arranging next week's drinks night.

The disconnect between the way that we communicate in the office, and the way we do the rest of the time, has become so vast that people now just naturally lower their expectations.

Amongst those teenagers on the cusp of joining the workforce, a more visual form of communication is the norm. As Snapchat has become the main platform for communication, teenagers have become accustomed to written messages being accompanied by the human touch of seeing someone's face.

Yet they face entering offices where faceless and expressionless email is still the primary method of communication. In fact, 45% of UK workers believe that over the next five years, email will continue to be their primary form of communication.

Some businesses might be wondering why all of this matters?

After all, email isn't broken, and you can always phone someone to speak to them. While it is true that these technologies are not going to disappear overnight, they will only be a part of a much greater suite of services that businesses need to offer their employees to work and communicate effectively.

Each new generation entering the workforce is demanding more from their employers and are fighting internally to try and catch up with the way that they're used to using technology. For many kids today, if they want an answer to a question, they don't sit down at a computer and Google it, but instead they ask Alexa. How long will it be until this is expected in the office?

If businesses don't keep pace with the way that new workers use technology, it could become a serious problem for attracting and retaining the best talent. After all, why work for a company where you'll be

constantly fighting out-dated technology when you can work somewhere that seamlessly integrates into how you were already living your life?

Of course, businesses need to ensure that they're separating out the passing fads from those technologies that will deliver a tangible impact for years to come. However, most business professionals agree that communication and collaboration is crucial, and that not enough happens in the workplace of today.

The year 2025 is closer than you might imagine!

Knowing what employees might need is no mystery. After all, your new cohort of graduate employees in 2025 are the young teenagers of today.

Meanwhile, the latest developments in consumer technology give us a window into their business applications, whether it's VR video conference rooms, or company chatbots to fulfil basic HR functions.

Preparing for that future now is not just vital to remain competitive, it's also critical to survive.

About the author

Co-founder of TomorrowToday Global & The Future of Work Academy. Futurist, International speaker, author, expert on the future of work.

Contact: graeme@tomorrowtodayglobal.com
www.tomorrowtodayglobal.com



These 10 trends highlight enormous, game-changing opportunities in a broad array of applications and industries. As you read through them, assess which ones will most affect you.



10 Technology-Driven Hard Trends

#1 Smart Virtual e-Assistants and Voice-Enabled Devices

In this blueprint there are numerous references to the use of smart e-assistants already offering what is rapidly becoming a mobile electronic concierge available on any smart device, including phones, tablets, televisions and cars.

You need to know that stand-alone audio assistants such as Amazon Echo and Google Home will expand rapidly into business and governmental applications. Soon retailers will have a Siri-like sales assistant, and soon also many of us will be using an e-personal health assistant that taps into the real-time health data from a smart watch to predict potential problems and offer suggestions.

#2 Advanced Cloud Computing Services

Businesses of all sizes will increasingly embrace new variations on public, private, hybrid and personal mobile clouds. This represents a major shift in how organisations obtain and maintain software, hardware and computing capacity to cut costs in IT, human resources and sales

management. Not all clouds are created equal. Some are optimised for IoT applications, while others are designed for different levels of security and speed.

#3 Virtualisation of Storage, Desktops, Applications and Networking

In addition to the rapid growth of virtual storage, virtualisation of processing power will continue to grow, allowing mobile devices to access supercomputer capabilities and apply them to processes such as purchasing and logistics. These services will help companies cut costs, as they provide access to powerful software programs and the latest technology without the expense of a large IT staff and time-consuming, expensive upgrades.

#4 Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) Apps and Devices

Augmented reality (AR) will quickly become more common by adding just-in-time information to our physical world. Simply aim your smartphone camera at a crowded street to find the stores that have the exact products you're looking for.

Better yet, we will soon be using conventional-looking glasses that allow wearers to overlay data on their fields of vision, providing useful information about what they're looking at. By contrast, virtual reality (VR)—using oversized headsets to provide an immersive, computer-generated 3D environment with which the wearer can interact—will grow more slowly due to the need for more time-intensive software design and the need to shut out the real world in order to use it.

AR and VR will soon shift from a single-user to a multi-user social experience.

#5 Internet of Things (IoT) Becomes Increasingly Intelligent

Machine-to-machine (M2M) communications using chips, microsensors and both wired and wireless networks will join networked sensors to create a rapidly growing IoT, sharing real-time data, performing diagnostics and making virtual repairs, all without human intervention!

By 2020, there will be well over 50 billion “things” talking to each other, performing tasks and making decisions based on predefined guidelines using AI. Not all data need to come back to the mother ship to create high value. Edge computing will increasingly be used to tame the massive amounts of data IoT will create.

#6 3D Printing (Additive Manufacturing) of Finished Goods

Personalised manufacturing of finished goods using 3D printing will grow exponentially. 3D printers build things by depositing material, typically plastic or metal, layer by layer, until the product is finished. Originally designed to print prototypes, they are increasingly being used to print final products, such as jewellery, iPhone cases, shoes, car dashboards, parts for jet engines, prosthetic limbs, human jaw bones, blood vessels, organs and much more. This allows companies to manufacture one-of-a-kind or small runs of items quickly, locally and with far fewer costs.

#7 Smarter Smartphones and Tablets Drive Mobile Process Innovation

The vast majority of mobile phones sold globally have browsers, making a smartphone our primary computer. This signals a profound shift in global computing, allowing businesses of all sizes to transform the ways in which they market, sell, communicate, collaborate,

educate, train and innovate using mobility.

#8 Mobile Apps for Business Process Innovation

As we increasingly transform business processes using mobility, use of mobile apps for purchasing, supply chain, logistics, distribution, service, sales and maintenance will grow rapidly.

There will be an increasing focus on business app stores within companies, giving the company a competitive advantage and giving users access to the personalised information they need on their mobile devices anytime and anywhere.

#9 Wearables and Applications

Wearables will increasingly be used for both personal and business applications. Apple, with its smartwatch fitted with health sensors and software, joins Google, Samsung, Microsoft and others in a battle for market share.

More complex software and applications will drive further innovation and sales in other wearable technology. One example is a patch that can be attached to the skin for remote disease management, diagnostics and general health via wireless transfer.

#10 Visual Communication for Business

Visual communication takes video conferencing to a new level thanks to free programs like Skype, FaceTime, Zoom and others for video communication on phones, tablets and home televisions. Businesses of all sizes are rapidly embracing this as a primary relationship-building and communications tool.

About the author

Daniel Burrus is considered one of the world's leading technology forecasters and innovation experts. He is the CEO of Burrus Research, a research and consulting firm that monitors global advances in technology driven trends.

He is the author of seven books, including The New York Times bestseller Flash Foresight, and his latest book is The Anticipatory Organization.

Daniel has a special offer to get a discounted copy of his book, please visit: www.TheAOBook.com

Contact: socialmedia@burrus.com; burrus.com; anticipatoryorganization.com

Flexible Workspace is at its tipping point and South Africa is leading the way!



■ We are entering the era of the mobile workforce and it is hugely exciting especially since SA is now seen as one of the leaders in this global workforce change.

At the start of 2018, over 18,000 professionals from a range of different industries in 96 countries spoke to IWG (International Workplace Group) about how they use flexible workspace. What they had to say suggests that a tipping point is coming and South Africa scored higher than the global average in all sections.

- 95% said that flexible workspace enables employees in their company to be more productive while on the move. Compared to 91% globally.
- 91% believe flexible working helps their business grow. Compared to 89% globally.
- 92% believe flexible working helps their business stay competitive. Compared to 87% globally,
- 89% believe flexible working helps their business maximise profits. Compared to 83% globally,
- 83% stated that enabling their company's employees to work from anywhere helped them recruit and retain top talent. Compared to 80% globally.

The emergence of this mobile workforce has been driven by technological change, globalisation and changes in employee expectations, according to IWG, the parent group of leading workspace companies including Regus and Spaces.

We are entering the era of the mobile workforce and it is hugely exciting. Not just for individual employees, but for businesses too. This is a huge shift in the workspace landscape globally, and businesses are now looking closely at what this means for their corporate real estate portfolios.

Moving away from office-based work

For generations, the world has understood office-based work to involve a fixed location and a 9-5 schedule. But an unprecedented number of businesses are now adopting a very different working model, which produces benefits for them and their workers.

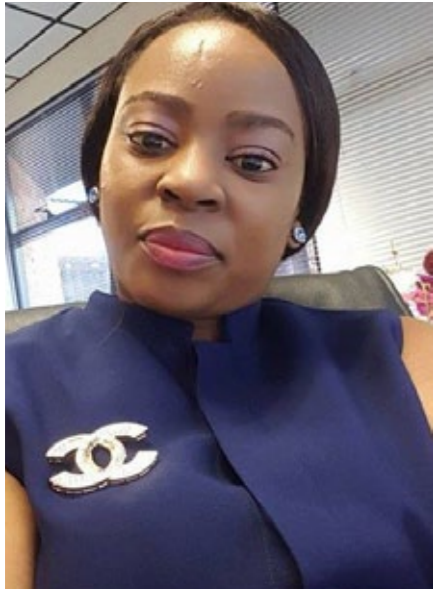
The IWG survey found that flexible working not only reduces commuting time, but enhances productivity, staff retention, job satisfaction and even creativity. This is in addition to the financial and strategic advantages that it brings for businesses.

Mark Dixon, Founder and CEO of IWG Plc. explains that changes in technology and digitalisation have led to a growing use of on-demand services generally in business, with organisations of all sizes wanting to increasingly outsource non-core activities.

Flexible working, supported by a professional on-demand workspace network, is now being discussed by senior leaders across functions in companies including risk management, business development, human resources, marketing and strategy.

One day soon, flexible working could simply be known as 'working'. We are reaching the tipping point.

Source: *The Workspace Revolution – Reaching The Tipping Point (Insights on flexible working from 18,000 professionals in 96 countries).*



When I think of the year 2025, I imagine that it is highly possible that we may not have a full-time office to operate from!

Gearing for a digital world and a new-look organisation

“Future organisations will look less corporate and more hotel-like in providing social spaces for collaborative work.”

I believe that the year 2025 will present a new-look workspace and a whole new world of work. We have seen this coming as the effects of technology have already seriously affected our lives and the way we work. Much of the hardware and software innovations have had a positive impact as chunks of our workload are taken off us, and has made us able to deliver faster what otherwise would have taken days to accomplish.

So far so good – but the speed with which new more fancy technology is coming our way, makes us ask: Are our jobs still safe?

How will organisations continue to respect the value of humans doing work?

How will it all play out?

Where will we work from?

Where will our executives be based? Mainly at the “office” i.e. office being in a corporate headquarters?

Will our executives go to the office every day?

When I think of the year 2025, I imagine that it is highly that possible we may not have a permanent office space! Will human PAs work in the same ‘space’ only some of the time?

It also scares me a little to think we are getting ready for a time of the paperless office as a reality! I suppose we will all get used to all information being captured and available on a ‘gadget’ and accessible to all.

What does the future work organisation look like?

An article by David Coleman suggests that the future work organisation is what he calls the “networked organisation.” The concept means that the organisation is likely to have a small core of people that deal with company management, marketing, product management, R&D, operations, and coordination. Other departments will be outsourced.

Organisations will obviously have lower overheads and are more agile and competitive.

Organisations will look less corporate and more hotel-like in providing social spaces for collaborative work.

Dan Rasmus, a futurist and author, is of the opinion that future organisations will see the following:

- Managers are mentors focused on project teams, not functional areas.
- Employees negotiate work commitments with project managers. Project managers define roles and resources and recruit/manage the team.
- Employees manage their own hours.
- The C-suite survives, as it is needed for overall direction, to instigate projects, and to arbitrate between teams.

“Obviously as organisations become more digital, they face a growing imperative to redesign themselves to move faster, adapt more quickly, facilitate rapid learning, and embrace the dynamic career demands of their people “ so say Josh Bersin, Tiffany McDowell, Amir Rahnema, Yves Van Durme in an article titled ‘The organisation of the future: Arriving now.’

They state that an important part of designing workplaces for adaptability is a shift away from hierarchical organisational structures toward models where work is accomplished in teams.

They believe that top companies “are built around systems that encourage teams and individuals to meet each other, share information transparently, and move from team to team depending on the issue to be addressed.”

What I found interesting is the point they make about accountability. “Empowering people to make decisions and relying on networks of interactions does not mean that people are no longer accountable for results. In fact, one objective of an agile network is to use goal-setting to support success.”

“In teams, accountability becomes more transparent. Individual and team goals and metrics should be shared for everyone to see.”

Fast forward

In conclusion, they suggest that as the organisation of the future takes hold, working in teams will likely become the norm in business.

What this means for many PAs, is that we will be part of a team; of various teams as they are formed, disbanded and reformed.

Exciting? Yes. We will be more prominent and have an equal stature alongside every team member.

Besides reading on this topic I also interviewed two fellow PAs. Their answers follow.

Sources:

<https://blog.cutter.com/2013/02/26/what-does-the-future-work-organization-look-like/>

<https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/focus/human-capital-trends/2017/organization-of-the-future.html>

Milicent Chanetsa is PA at Emeritus Reinsurance Company. She is a member of PAFSA's Academy of Excellence and is accredited by the PITMAN Board. Her career has seen her travel to most countries in the SADC Region.

An interview
with

Carine
Daniels



Executive Assistant
Manager at CTICC
Carine Daniels was
PA of the Year in 2016

Q *As technology takes over our offices, how much disruption has it caused to your workplace in terms of space design and effectiveness?*

It is without a doubt that technology has radically changed the work environment; it might not have had a rapid impact on space design as such though the office space has certainly changed over time to a more “on the go” concept.

Workspaces have become more confined and transformed into more practical work areas consisting of only modern equipment providing more flexibility in terms of where you can work from, and the improvement of accessibility to IT infrastructures and communications tools.

The effectiveness of the office space has without a doubt improved with various technologies being available at the tips of our fingers.

How much has technology affected the way you and your boss work as a team, and how much more do you expect it to affect in the future?

I have been exposed to a work environment where the generation span exists from Baby Boomers to Millennials and I find myself right in the middle of these two generations.

It has been an interesting development journey noticing the influence of technology and the effect thereof between me and my boss.

At times it takes a great effort to convince a “Baby Boomer” to consider the latest technology as a communication medium to improve collaboration, which always proves to be effective the moment it has been implemented.

A noticeable change and improvement in the effectiveness of team work and communication with a quicker turnaround time on expected deliveries, has been a great plus! But there is always room for improvement.

What advice would you give to PAs who work in environments where their technology is still lagging behind?

It is important to always stay on top of your game, whether it is industry related, educational or technology orientated. If you want to be successful you need to move with the times.

Educate yourself in terms of the current technology trends, do research to find out which of these trends will have a positive impact on your

performance, as well as on the performance of your executives; work towards implementing such a change, it can be a small step at a time, but “get with it”!

Where do you think millennial PAs have an advantage regarding even more technological introductions into work processes and workplace design?

My administrator who certainly is a millennial through and through has recently introduced me to the online program “basecamp” – my socks were knocked off, it works; it is fast; it is productive and it keeps us on top of our deliverables.

The Millennial PA will surely be able to create and design a workplace filled with quick, practical and creative processes to assist with effective delivery of tasks and objectives.

How should organisations prepare their PAs for the onset of IPAs like Siri, Alexa, etc?

This will be a brilliant implementation which will provide the PA with more time to focus on business related matters and less tedious administrative activities.

In a recent article published by Computer World it was confirmed that Amazon, Microsoft as well as Cisco launched a so called 'Intelligent Personal Assistant' for the workplace which is aimed at automating and simplifying a variety of office tasks such as checking calendars, reorder supplies, set up meetings and kick off video conference calls.

From other recent articles it appears that there is still a long way to go before the onset of robotic services can be fully integrated.

“Alexa for Business, though limited in scope today, points to opportunities for deeper integration and workplace productivity enhancements in the future,” Werner Goertz, Research Director of Gartner.

Source:

<https://www.computerworld.com/article/3241225/collaboration/alexa-for-business-paves-way-for-smart-ai-assistants-at-work.html>

“ The Millennial PA will surely be able to create and design a workplace filled with quick, practical and creative processes to assist with effective delivery of tasks and objectives. ”

An interview
with

Sonja Bohländer



PA at Sasol's
Sasolburg Operations

Q *Sonja, as technology takes over our offices, how much disruption has it caused to your workplace in terms of space design and effectiveness?*

Technology has 'disrupted' largely for the better. Work space has decreased but equipment has reduced in size and nearly all work is done electronically.

It is because of positive effects that companies continue to invest in the latest technologies, which includes state of the art printers that are able to do anything from copying and printing to scanning. The only negative is that these printers are often expensive and only a single printer per department is made available, which results in queuing at printers which makes you unproductive and is time consuming.

(Do you still remember having to feed papers back into a printer, in order to get duplex printing done?)

A point to be considered is that continual software upgrades can often be disruptive as your PC can just restart at the most inappropriate moment! Networks are often slow or down for a particular reason and this affects the whole team.

How much has technology affected the way you and your boss work as a team, and how much more do you expect it to affect in the future?

Upgraded software programmes applicable to our business environment were installed which effectively enhances the way we work. Important information is immediately accessible to the manager in real-time. Information is immediately obtainable which before would have taken a few phone calls and discussions before the necessary information could be obtained. The manager operates out of his office more with the use of electronic collaboration tools which includes Telepresence and Skype.

Systems allow us to place documents on servers where it can be edited by more than one individual simultaneously and a final document is readily available at the click of a button. PAs do not need to spend hours trying to collate changes. Reporting and sharing of documents is so much easier. Electronic signature systems have enhanced productivity and most work can be done on mobile phones.

Research is a lot easier with multiple topics available online!

What advice would you give to PAs who work in environments where their technology is still lagging behind?

PAs in environments that do not have the latest technologies available need to ensure that they use what technologies they have, optimally.

Learning material on any software programme is available online and they should access it to ensure that they use what they have effectively.

It is essential that companies should also stay abreast of new technologies in order to keep up with the rest of the business world. In terms of electronic collaboration, there are so many benefits of having the latest technologies that I am sure even in smaller companies some upgrades would only enhance their ability to communicate with sister companies/ customers and service providers electronically. Systems and software should be available that will make work easier and faster and ultimately everyone more productive.

PAs in work environments where technology is still lagging behind should network with others and establish what is used most efficiently and make suggestions to their management to upgrade systems and processes, to enhance electronic communication.

Where do you think millennial PAs have an advantage regarding even more technological introductions into work processes and workplace design?

Millennial PAs as well as the younger generation management, 'grow up' using the latest technologies on their smart phones and are accustomed to the ever changing technology landscape. They are more comfortable and not intimidated to try and test it; they grasp new technological concepts easier and have no emotional barriers. They fit into "modern" workplaces with ease.

An article by Brianna Steinhilber on nbcnews.com noted that a large number of employees have a desire for flexibility and for working remotely, but none more so than millennials. It mentions that optimal engagement boosts occur when employees spend 60 to 80% of their time working remotely.

As flexibility and working remotely goes hand in hand, it is thus evident that in the future perhaps many millennial PAs could be working remotely.

How should organisations prepare their PAs for the onset of IPAs like Siri, Alexa, etc?

Organisations will need to assist PAs to understand this,

and the advantages therein; not to see it as a threat but rather as a growth opportunity.

PAs know the components of the process that they use and they can be positioned as process experts to provide support and act as a point of contact.

PAs must be assisted to understand that their role, as they know it currently, will most probably not exist by 2025 – or even earlier! With the onset of AI (and other technologies) it is becoming faster and easier for people to interact directly with bots.

Assuming there is a positive mindset within the PA community, PAs will be in an ideal position to familiarise themselves with the technology and become "expert users". Organisations must therefore assist PAs on this emotional and skill journey to better understand the end state.

Management – from an end user perspective – is not necessarily going to have the time to set up and customise the technology, and if PAs can be trained in the relevant technology, they will be enabled to not only add value to her manager but to whole departments.

(Partnering me in answering these questions were: Johlene Kymdell, Audit Services Administrator in Sasol's Assurance Services and Deon Meyer (Senior Manager Service Performance and Continuous Improvement in Sasol Group Services)

“ Assuming there is a positive mindset within the PA community, PAs will be in an ideal position to familiarise themselves with the technology and become 'expert users' ”

An interview
with

Arthur Goldstuck



Arthur Goldstuck, CEO of World Wide Worx, is a pioneer in the South African market in the use of the Internet as a tool for productivity

Q *Arthur, as a leading tech-trends analyst, I would like to ask you whether in South Africa we are really ready for the technology onslaught?*

I believe that corporate South Africa has in fact arrived at a high-tech watershed in how it uses technology to gain a competitive edge.

I say this because a new study conducted by us at World Wide Worx, shows that many large South African enterprises are now poised to embrace emerging technologies like Robotics, the Internet of Things, and Artificial Intelligence.

Our partner in the study Mark Wilson, Marketing Director of SYSPRO Africa, explains that corporates are seeing their counterparts globally being disrupted by small, nimble newcomers or large companies which are willing to disrupt themselves, and realise they have to respond.

Are you saying that there is no longer a choice! We are forced to adapt or die?

Yes, if South African organisations do not make this adaptation an integral part of their strategic direction, they will find themselves performing crisis management instead of strategy management.

It's interesting that when we conducted our survey through telephonic interviews to decision makers at 400 large companies in South Africa, we discovered that there was low current usage, but massive intended usage, of cutting edge technologies. For example, while only 13% of enterprise IT decision-makers said that they currently use big data and machine learning, which adds up to artificial intelligence, a further 55% said they would adopt these technologies in the near future.

Robotics has been deployed in only 6% of companies, but a further 45% said they planned to do so. Almost all those who have no plans in this direction, cited cost as the main reason to stay away.

In dramatic contrast, almost two thirds of the respondents, 66%, say that they currently use technologies related to the Internet of Things (IoT). The majority of those not using it, plan to do so (a further 28%), while all those currently using it plan to increase their usage.

I am finding all this talk about AI a little overwhelming! Should we be fearing AI? There's all this buzz about AI taking over jobs...

But AI can also create jobs, If South Africa embraces AI, it will grow the economy and improve productivity. All very relevant given our current economic climate, which emphasises the importance of government's role in enabling AI as a catalyst for growth.

AI can open up opportunities to create new value, reinforcing how people drive growth in business. It can also help people be more

productive - by some estimates, leading to a 40% increase in labour productivity by 2035.

But do you think we, as a workforce, are ready for AI?

Good question. I don't believe all are ready for the AI revolution already underway in other parts of the world. Indeed, like workers in many countries, South Africans are concerned that AI may affect their jobs and even worsen income inequality.

But when companies show in their planning and implementation that technology and humans can work side-by-side productively, mindsets will change as people adapt their skills to be productive in different ways.

“AI can open up opportunities to create new value, reinforcing how people drive growth in business.”

The Future of Work is Here! Organisations need to change

New standards around workplace collaboration will require us to shift how we think about organising our workforces.

The convergence of technological advancements and generational shifts are rapidly transforming the way we work. From mobile and machine learning to analytics and automation, different technologies are taking over the workplace and drastically altering the capability requirements of the existing workforce.

At the same time, the composition of the workforce is evolving: networks of contractors, partnerships and freelance contributors are intermingling with traditional full-time employees. Making this shift even more interesting are the digital automation tools that are further changing what work is done.

Traditional organisational structures from decades ago are ill-suited for how work actually gets done today and will be done in the future. This is because work is no longer a function of command-and-control hierarchical structures. Rather, most work today, regardless of your formal structure, is getting done in organic networks.

Though empowering, the digital age is confusing. As a result, employees have counterproductively adopted an assortment of different tools out of necessity for collaboration.

If organisations leave employees on their own to answer the complex questions posed by the digital age, then not only can business performance suffer, but also talent will likely flee.

Continued on next page

Collaboration required

Doing nothing isn't an option. The best talent won't stay long where collaboration is weak. Collaboration is a mix of virtual and physical participation and cooperation for a common overarching cause.

Accordingly, as digital solutions drive an increase in employee and customer expectations, being intentionally collaborative is critical to aligning how work gets done across technologies, people and boundaries.

When leaders are asked if their people collaborate, they usually answer "yes," but if you ask if they are intentional in creating or fostering collaboration, they will usually respond "sometimes" or "no," leaving their companies' collaboration efforts to be inconsistent and largely left to chance.

Research published in 2017 by professional services firm Deloitte on how to create an organisation where talent wants to be has found that meaningful work, supportive management, a positive work environment, growth opportunities and trust in leadership are key ingredients, while cross-organisation collaboration and communication tie it together to make the organisation "simply irresistible."

What do the new ways of effective collaboration look like in practice?

Consider the story of one of our clients, an international bank with more than 100,000 employees. Unifying its global workforce had grown difficult. However, the bank's new collaborative system is proving to be an impactful tool because it gives employees the ability to opt-in to forums and groups they want to be part of, rather than being on the receiving end of email distribution with irrelevant information for many employees.

Leading collaboration tools are designed to create network-based groups that reduce the perceived distance between employees and foster collaboration. Moreover, these tools extend collaboration beyond the borders of the organisation to include customers, suppliers and partners. Thus, having a collaboration platform provides a differentiated way of connecting and working across workforce generations, geographies and levels.

Aside from deploying a new collaboration tool or creating a geographic collaboration zone, what other tangible actions can an organisation take to improve their talent through an intentionally collaborative culture?

Below are just a few of the multiple minimum viable changes that can help generate momentum:

- Start staff meetings with a "collaboration moment" with employees sharing unique ways they are collaborating across silos, hierarchies, geographies and even with customers.
- Establish a Collaboration Center of Excellence to help employees use collaboration zones, collaboration tools and work collaboratively across organisational boundaries.
- Conduct an Organisation Network Analysis, known as an ONA, to understand who, how and why certain people are connecting to generate more impactful work.

Doing nothing isn't an option

The future of work has arrived, and companies can't afford to ignore it. Substantial changes in workplace technology, workforce demographics and worker preferences have drastically altered how talent is sourced, operates and is managed.

Work across business and talent ecosystems is becoming increasingly complex and requires collaboration to be intentional not incidental. Not only do the majority of employees want to work for digitally enabled organisations, but also they perceive working for less digitally mature organisations as potentially harmful to their careers.

By cultivating more effective collaboration, companies can fundamentally alter the way they work to find new ways to solve complex business problems, innovate and improve the overall employee experience.

Erica Volini is the U.S. human capital leader for Deloitte Consulting LLP. Garth Andrus is a human capital leader in Deloitte Digital and Deloitte Consulting LLP.

Source: <http://www.talenteconomy.io/2018/01/18/future-of-work/>

Chapter 4

Technology is nothing.
What's important is that you have
a faith in people,
that they're basically good and
smart, and if you give them tools,
they'll do wonderful things
with them.

– Steve Jobs

Preparing yourself for the year 2025:

REGARDING EMERGING TECHNOLOGY SCENARIOS

Featuring:

FOREWORD by futurist Chris Bishop (USA)

ANCHOR FEATURE by futurist Jonathan Crossland (SA)

OPINION PIECE by trends analyst Reana Rossouw (SA)

FOCUS FEATURE by PA, Linda van Noordwyk, finalist in South Africa's PA of the Year 2017. She also interviews:

- Christelle Dippenaar, Executive Assistant, Paramount Group
- Nerine Ungerer, PA, Tyres & More a division of TiAuto Investments (Pty) Ltd
- An academic: Prof Alwyn Louw; President and Academic President; Monash South Africa

LAST WORD by Erica Volini and Garth Andrus (US)



As technologies continue to disrupt and transform every industry, the role of the executive assistant is morphing dramatically. Gone are the days when the main focus was on managing an executive's calendar and making sure he or she had coffee or water and was protected from unwanted interruptions or distractions.

Let the bots do the dull work so the EAs can shine

As technologies including AI and robotics take over menial and redundant tasks, successful EAs will need to focus on doing what humans can do better than machines and bots.

The changing role of the EA is also a direct result of the morphing face of employment and the evolving workplace of the future.

There are huge implications for the EA role being driven by the emergence of the gig economy. As MIT professor Tom Malone describes so eloquently in his seminal book:

"The Future of Work", in the decades ahead the employer/employee relationship model will become much more like the process used to make movies.

Teams will assemble based on their skills and their network. They will do the work whether it is writing a piece of code or building a space plane. They will then disband and go on to the next work situation.

This model has huge implications for executive assistants.

The implications for EAs

Even today, job marketplaces like UpWork let executive assistants work as needed – sort of the Uber for EAs!

There are many companies like Time Etc or Fancy Hands that connect talented people with opportunities to work as Virtual Assistants. They can hire themselves out for a certain number of hours per week or month, using an open-ended subscription model much the way software like Office 365 is offered as a service. Adoption of this approach is only going to increase.

Some executive assistants will still want to work at one company. To be successful in this setting, EAs will need to cultivate a much broader set of skills. Continually evolving algorithm-driven scheduling tools like x.ai and Doodle will handle the time management issues with minimal guidance. But more and different kinds of technology will be incorporated into the day to day operations of every company.

An EA of the future will need to be able to analyse and assess continually emerging technologies in order to

make strategic recommendations about tools and processes, the objective being to help an executive be more productive and efficient.

Augmented and virtual reality tools will be increasingly deployed to conduct meetings, to interact with customers, to manage the supply chain, to field inquiries from employees, journalists and analysts.

Executive assistants will need to stay current on available options and know how to pick the right tool for the right situation. Then be prepared to manage all the attendant processes around that tool, understanding each one's advantages and limitations.

The EA will need to know how to run a meeting in a virtual environment, how to create virtual assets and capture 3D notes as needed.

The new profile

One very exciting aspect of the new workplace paradigm is that as bots and algorithms increasingly do the repetitive tasks, people are expected to do more with less. This means that assistants will have the potential to become trusted advisors.

By acquiring management consulting-type skills, including an awareness of market trends, competitors and potential business opportunities, EAs will be able to position themselves much more advantageously.

We are entering an entirely different paradigm for the role of executive and administrative assistants. But the potential to make significant and meaningful contributions in these roles has never been greater and will only increase in the years ahead.

About the author

Chris Bishop (USA): nonlinear multimodal careerist, futurist, bass player.

Contact: chris@improvingcareers.com

While it is true that technology influences job roles and titles, is it necessarily true that it eradicates all roles in its path? Is it inevitable that technologies like Artificial Intelligence will replace the Personal Assistant?



The PAth ahead

Over the last few decades, technology has been moving incredibly fast. Technology is at first clunky and experimental and difficult to use but can eventually migrate into the ubiquitous. This is true of the printing industry, the entire computing industry from the server to desktop to mobile devices and the software they all run.

If a technology does not achieve its place in society, it tends to be recycled and reimagined in the next generation! This is true of video telephone devices:

In the 1870s the first video telephone incarnation was born. It has been reimagined every decade or so since. The idea reinvents itself in various wired telephone models, conferencing equipment, smart devices, VoIP and general software.

The video call is still a relatively minor technology, but Apple's FaceTime and Skype (now Microsoft Skype) has come through as dominant influences for the uptake. Even though it has improved in every decade since the 60's, it's still not ubiquitous.

As technologies are invented and improved, they come with certain costs. One obvious cost and where the large population is often scare-mongered is job security. You will always hear of motor vehicle factories automated builds and work is increasingly done by robotics. Very large car brands sometimes have very large layoffs.

Will technologies aid or replace the PA?

The assistant is an augmentation role. The role is an aid, a second pair of arms, an organiser, collaborator and of course a filter. Does that sum you up? What about a front face, someone who smooths the rough edges or someone who cleans up after?

The role is so diverse; I couldn't quite declare the facets that covered everyone's role! Your role is always nuanced and of course, extremely malleable and custom to who and where you are.

Artificial Intelligence with implementations from Siri, Bixby and Google Assistant is said to be revolutionary. Rather than accepting that, let's look at AI from the lesson learnt from video calling and see if the technology really is a threat.

How is artificial intelligence doing?

In short, awful.

Since the birth of software languages, compilers and neural network algorithms, scientists have been looking to optimise and create that incredible ubiquitous machine that is the augmented brain:

Say something to a little box or microphone and the context-free grammars kick in, the audio, speech recognition algorithms jump forth and 'automagically' you have an appointment scheduled. Except when you list Siri and Bixby and others in this area, you are listing a very clumsy unhelpful technology.

Forget word inflexions and having a head cold, it is more the actual use that comes into question.

Speaking into a microphone, the words, "open camera" and "cheese", is not exactly science of the amazing Terry the Magician, is it?

What these AI answers forget are context and process.

To be truly helpful, AI must move to more serious firmaments.

An example of the kind of process that borders on helpful.

1. Book meeting
2. Add attendees
3. Evaluate availability
4. Negotiate with Attendees
5. Go to 1 if required
6. Confirm
7. Send Directions
8. Provide reminder

Another area that AI must overcome is communication between other platforms. AI must still learn to communicate with other AI. Without that, Siri can't book the hotel, where Bixby is used.

Hardware and processing power is another factor. In order for AI to be smart, the datasets and processor time it needs to calculate potential answers is currently designed to be performance friendly. This seriously limits the abilities of the AI. Devices will need to be double or triple the speed of current devices.

AI is not ready. All assistants can rest easy. You will definitely be able to retire doing the same job. You only have to ensure you continue to be valuable. AI is not (yet).

I leave you with the prophecy that job threatening AI is still at least 25 years away. Acceptance in the workplace will add 10-15 years more on top of that.

About the author

Jonathan Crossland is an author and Software Architect. He founded Lucid Ocean, a software development company based in Cowes, UK and Cape Town, South Africa. He is focused on delivering solutions for a wide cross section of business, including applications, workflow, cloud software and blockchain technologies.

Contact: jonathan@lucidocean.co.za

Although I do believe there will always be a role to play for executive and personal/administrative assistants, I have lived without one for the past seven years. And I have paid a price for this – I do not think I have necessarily been as effective as I could have been.

From administrators or PAs to Personal Executives (PEs)

Having been without the support of a PA has been the result of two things:

- I could not find people with the necessary skills
- I could not find people that were prepared to learn new skills.

This reality is directly linked to my view of the future and where I see PEs can add tremendous value.

1. **The role of technology.** In as much as people can now manage their own diaries, their own travel, their own administration through mobile/cell phone technology, I believe the biggest value executive assistants can provide is to be 100% comfortable with the use of various technology platforms in order to provide value add.

For example: Comfort with and knowledge of new apps such as Travelstart or Hootsuite, etc.

2. **The role of social media.** As people can now manage their own online presence, communication, publishing and research, I believe the biggest value and contribution can come from being 100% knowledgeable and comfortable with various social media platforms, channels and technology – this is

where an executive/personal assistant can provide the biggest value to me and to my company in the future.

For example: Tweet on my behalf, to create a social media content management schedule, to update various online platforms such as LinkedIn, Google+, add words, competitor research online, etc.

3. **The two trends combined.** Where there is opportunity – in that by saving me time – there is a clear value-add that can be quantified and qualified. Not only in the saving of time – but providing support across these platforms will also provide me with the opportunity to market and sell better; again, this value-add is highly quantifiable. The reason why this is important to understand is that this type of support is where the difference lies in earning potential; examples would be to source contacts on LinkedIn, to create client or prospect databases, etc. I am not expecting assistants to be salespeople, but for them to consider what would add value to me personally, my business and add to my competitiveness.

For example: Help me operate and think more effectively.



4. **My biggest concern with the current sector challenges is that it is focused on providing support, but not being proactive.** I think executive assistants and administrative assistants see themselves as only being a support function – but there is so much potential and opportunity for being proactive, seizing opportunities to add value and changing perceptions. However, that will require a willingness to step forward, take initiative, learn new skills, and I think the opportunity is there – it is just not taken.

For example: What preparation is there within the sector to survive in such a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world where multi-skilled people will be required?

5. **Continuous learning and knowledge creation.** One of the biggest currencies and revenue drivers in my business and industry sector is the ability to find information, synthesise, assimilate and interpret information to create new knowledge. And this is I believe another opportunity for value add. Future PAs will benefit much from these skills as well.

My argument or thesis for the future is thus, that yes

technology, artificial intelligence and automation may be seen as a threat to the profession and industry, but I also believe that it provides an opportunity for new career paths.

The world is changing and as such the industry needs to adapt or be disrupted.

In closing then – as we move toward the year 2025 – I believe that we will not call people administrators or assistants but personal executives!

We will need people with social media and technology skills as well as conflict management and systems thinking skills, critical thinking and research skills. In other words, people that are multi-skilled, that can operate in a technology enhanced world, but still have the human insight to provide support and assistance as and where needed.

About the author

Reana Rossouw is trend analyst and the owner and founder of Next Generation Consultants.

Contact: Reana at rrossouw@nextgeneration.co.za



Change is pervasive, perennial and clearly inevitable. Change can be very exciting and for many it might be frightening. I cannot even start to envisage how the PA role would be by 2025.

Adapting our thinking to the changing world

“Agility is your willingness to change, your ability to change, and the nimbleness you exhibit as you adapt to change – quickly, is key to your future.”

We live in a fast-moving world of change. It feels like living in an “instant life” everything can be exchanged, returned, refunded or upgraded.

Life is changing at such a dramatic pace that it is intriguing to even imagine what the future will bring. As technology changes, it changes the way we live our day-to-day lives and I wonder if there will be PAs in the “human form”! Perhaps the millennial PA whom I interviewed, Nerine Ungerer, is right in saying that in the future robots will be doing a PA’s work.

Every day we experience the growing impact of the evolution of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics, just watch the videos of “Sophia” the human like robot on YouTube or read her story on <http://www.hansonrobotics.com/robot/sophia/>. “Sophia is Hanson Robotics’ latest and most advanced robot to date and a cultural icon”. Sophia was the first Robot in the world that was granted citizenship and Saudi Arabia was the first country to grant Sophia this citizenship. This is all real and we need to stay on top of the technology changes, and familiarise ourselves with the new and trendy all of the time.

The primary change that PAs have had to adapt to is the drive towards a more digital and connected business environment.

The PA role will continue to evolve into more effective and efficient management of admin, and streamline of processes, done through systems as well as use of technology.

In an article by Susan M. Heathfield (*Your Organisation’s Future Demands Agility*) she says and I quote:

“Agility is your willingness to change, your ability to change, and the nimbleness you exhibit as you adapt to change – quickly, is key to your future”.

To be prepared for the changes coming we need to identify if there are any barriers in our lives that will hold us back.

We will have to become an expert in our own space and to own it.

If I reminisce on when I started my first administrative position, everything I did was done manually and now almost everything is automated. From hand-written letters to type writers to desk tops to laptops to smart pens and smart phones and smart robots – scary I think, but true.

I interviewed three people on this topic and I’d like to share with you what I gauged from their answers.

Prof Alwyn Louw says that we need to focus less on leveraging technology and automation as merely a means to greater profitability, and more on how the workforce of the future might engage with technology for the mutual benefit of corporations and society.

Christelle Dippenaar, a Senior PA, shared her thoughts with me on the future of the PA profession, and her answers in full are provided in the ensuing pages. Christelle hopes that PAs will have more time to focus on the bigger picture and being more proactive and not reactive.

Christelle does not see AI as a threat and said that it should not be man vs machine but rather man and machine. I agree, we should change our thinking to be more open to the changing world. I believe that we should not fear the future but embrace it.

My Millennial PA, Nerine Ungerer made a powerful

statement by saying that “A perfect mix of charm and grace is not what makes people invaluable, rather it’s empathy, proactivity and attitude of gratitude that will make you invaluable.”

It is true that we as PAs must make ourselves invaluable by keeping updated with the changes, have a positive attitude and be ready to use our changing skills to assist. Nerine’s answers in full are provided in the ensuing pages.

I live by the statement of: “Work smarter and not harder”. I believe that we need to adapt positively and quickly to these changing circumstances, and should use technology to our advantage - and as such, we need to keep up-to-date with the latest office gadgets and industry best practices.

Most of us know the famous saying by Benjamin Franklin “Time is money”. In the corporate world, shareholders always want to know what is the ROI (Return on Investment).

PAs should think of their role and main tasks as adding value to the business, because the more value, the better the investments i.e. if you add more value the more likely it is that your company will invest in you.

We need to always strive to be an asset to our employers; this is the only way we can contribute to the success of the company and remain valuable.

The future of our profession is about connections, adaptability and improving our technology and interpersonal skills; it is a continuous learning.

We need to conquer the Technology World, not surrender to it!

*Linda van Noordwyk is Executive PA at TiAuto Investments
Linda is a member of PAFSA’s Academy of Excellence who
believes in having strong ethical values and integrity.
Linda believes that one should always remain true
to yourself in all circumstances even when no-one is
watching.*

An interview
with

Christelle Dippenaar



Executive Assistant
at Paramount Group

Q *Christelle, how do YOU imagine our role to be around the year 2025...?*

I recall the brown, long, striped orange leaves trying to escape from the low hanging branches, each leaf in competition with the next one, to get away...

If only I could get away, it was end of September, the year 2025.

She came out of nowhere; she literally appeared and saved my life – so I thought.

Streets in Kansas City are always occupied, always causing wear and tear to your destination, onwards, outwards. Listening to a song of Metallica, nothing else matters, caught in my own thinking, my own longing of acceptance, having the answers... when a loud shout and a smash to my window brought me back to reality, he shouted, I will tear you apart, I will send you into eternity, get out, get out...

The next moment, all hell broke loose, the man fell down and it seemed like he was trying to mimic the position of a foetal whilst clutching his head.

A shadow appeared and looked at me and turned its head and said “no, no, no hurt...”

That was the moment I met Metallica... never got her real name but guessed she was made of metal, hence the name!

OK, serious now...

We won't have to work in an office, we will be able to work from many places, including home. This will save money on renting an office space, reimbursing us for travel claims, etc.

Think about your day. The majority of time is spent connected to the internet on your laptop, e-mails, taking calls from your mobile, who needs landlines? Who still uses fax machines? The only reason I have to be at the office is because all my physical files are here, or to attend meetings, which are still done the old-fashioned way, face-to-face.

In future, all files will be saved on a network in the cloud and we won't have any physical files IT departments can already remote control our laptops if there is IT issues.

For team meetings and client meetings, we will be using software, much better than SKYPE or even ZOOM combined, a type of 3D Hologram program, where the picture and sound will make it seem real.

For functions, you will be there but not really be there, as you will be sitting in your home and your hospitality team will run an event 1 000 km from you. They will wear intelligent glasses, allowing you to see whatever they see, enabling you to assist with the setup and give

instructions. WhatsApp groups will be more developed in terms of chats, sharing ideas, and providing instant know-how!

What do you (fear, hope, anticipate) will change? What are your thoughts on the challenges ahead?

I hope for more time to focus on the bigger picture and on being proactive as opposed to reactive!

At the moment everyone in our immediate teams – from the maintenance team, the admin team, the drivers, the catering staff – needs constant guidance, constant learning and a constant push to work smarter. We solve problems in a crisis mode where other people's bad planning becomes our problem.

We deal with last minute requests; people change their minds last minute, not realising the impact or the effort that has gone into the planning based on their original request.

Different divisions don't take ownership of their responsibilities. It is a never-ending cycle to chase departments for outstanding tasks/information. Clearly, my vote will be for all this to change!

One of the fears will be around cyber security including the protection of personal and company information! Hackers will be on the increase and will not only have access to the cyber components but also to the hardware of AI.

The biggest challenge still for any business is “to cut costs and to give customers more value”; I don't see any form of AI as a threat; it should not be man vs. machine but rather man and machine.

So where desktop computers replaced typewriters, laptops replaced desktop computers, mobile phones replaced cameras and desk phones, fax to email has replaced fax machines, map books have been replaced by Waze, the list goes on, we have actually been moving with this tide of change all along. It is called technology and AI is already part of it.

There is no reason to fear because human intervention will always be needed, whether it is for repairs or maintenance. Humans will be the “masterminds” behind all the programming.

More awareness is needed to inform people about what AI's are and what positive contributions they can bring to the workplace. But at the same time, advice around study options should be made available to school leavers to inform them what courses there are that will enable them to work with AIs, and prepare them for the future work environment.

What are the uncertainties as well as the tools of hope according to your boss?

As you know our bosses are really busy and, when you do get a moment for a one-on-one, you have to push through 50 questions to get some guidance and their input to help you clear pending tasks – but I did get to ask the boss this question and the answer I was given was paper 'trail! We will still need a paper trail to allay the fear that papers may disappear and it all ending up in the cloud.

To be quite honest the future is not something that they are really concerned about now as they know there will always be someone (namely, the PA), watching their backs and being available to assist them.

In some ways we have made them too dependent on us especially where the majority of Executives/Business Owners, etc. come from old school practices or rather a different generation. I personally think your Millennial Executives/Business Owners will have a far better understanding and vision for AI for their own support but also for the future planning of their organisations.

Tools of hope, would be to automate more repetitive work that we need to do on a daily, monthly and yearly basis, like credit card recons, insurance policy renewals/reviews, vehicle license renewals, collecting post/parcels from the post office, to name a few. For example, I want to give someone OR something the pack of slips from my wallet and say: "Sort, compare my calendar, my emails and my WhatsApp communications for information on the card spend and sort my slips for the Accounts department".

What scenarios does your boss/company envisage?

Coming from a manufacturing background, there will be automation of more manufacturing processes.

An interview
with

Nerine Ungerer



Executive PA at TiAuto
Investments (Pty) Ltd

Q *Nerine, how do YOU imagine our role to be around the year 2025... What do you (fear, hope) anticipate will change?*

In my current situation, I have a boss that is a Technology-addict. Every week it is something new. I have learned to adapt and use all these technologies which actually assist me in doing my work. Now, it has formed part of ME.

I think that in 2025 we will be so advanced in technology and doing everything with all the fancy apps and gadget that they can call Personal Assistants, ROBOTS. This is so valuable, because it will make life so much easier.

I have internalised a few key qualities that anyone can master. A perfect mix of charm and grace is not what makes people invaluable. Empathy, proactivity and an attitude of gratitude is what will make you the person no one can let go of.

In my role as a Personal Assistant in a growing organisation, my job is to be invaluable to my fellow workers, suppliers and especially my boss.

Part of this whole change actually makes me a little bit nervous, because with all this technology we are easily replaceable; but strangely, I am also super excited by the possible changes technology could bring.

What are your thoughts on the challenges ahead? What are the uncertainties as well as the tools of hope according to your boss?

I have learned to value how technology can assist in so many ways. But every Personal Assistant is unique and can teach a few people a few tricks, for example:

- Document our work and processes and give tips to someone else.
- Show people how invaluable we are and educate executives on how much we actually do to save the day.
- Read technology magazines, even if it may be daunting in the beginning.

Simple technology improvements can be a valuable asset, releasing precious minutes and hours back into your workweek. Our time at work is valuable and every minute counts. I guess that is why I have an automatic signature at the bottom of every email. It would be pretty slow for me to type all those details of my signature every time.

Sometimes technology can make people feel under-appreciated and under-valued. Although properly viewed and utilised, technology in a company environment can be seen as an investment, serving to improve productivity and not necessarily replace people.

What scenarios does your boss/company envisage in terms of how people can remain relevant in the face of invading automation and AI?

Today we stand at the brink of another dramatic change, the advent of artificial intelligence (AI). Can you imagine? Software-driven machines that have learned to process unstructured information meaningfully; something that until recently we believed was the domain of humans alone. There are short term benefits from intelligent technology: Potentially freed-up resources, happier customers, happier staff and a reputation for innovation.

As we start scaling up AI and automation, PAs need to be ambitious and think about how we can combine technologies to become more and more advanced in the work we do.

“Today we stand at the brink of another dramatic change, the advent of artificial intelligence (AI). Can you imagine?”

In the
words of

Ken DeMaria

Ambient Intelligence

"Like autonomous vehicles, the office of the future will also enable workers to better manage work complexities. Here, Ambient Intelligence will rely on the symbiotic relationship between the Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), enabling the office to respond in real-time to human activities, creating a better sense of comfort, security, safety and productivity.

Thus, a workplace app might book a desk, check the food and handle messages. Within the building, AI will calculate for workers and teams where to book seats so they can sit together and work more easily."

An interview
with

Prof. Alwyn
Louw



Professor Alwyn Louw;
President and Academic President;
Monash South Africa

Q *In your view, are we really aware of the need to prepare ourselves for the year 2025 and beyond?*

For most people, the year 2025 seems like the very distant future. But when you consider that 18 years have already passed since the prospect of a new millennium had the world in a panic over what would happen to their computers and data, the next seven is sure to fly by at a similarly eye-watering pace.

Interestingly, while the number of days per year is never going to change, the pace at which the world changes every day is guaranteed to keep accelerating. While it's possible that predictions of driverless cars, wearable cellphones, and voice controlled appliances will have become our lifestyle realities in 2028, the one area in which complete transformation is guaranteed is the world of work.

The way we live and work could be seriously disrupted?

Yes. Thanks to a combination of elements, not least of which are rapid technological evolution, massive urbanisation, and fast-diminishing energy, water and food resources, the relationship between industry and broader society is set to quickly and radically change. This is the true impact of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution.

It's not just that the role of technology is growing; but that this increasing technological impact demands a completely new way of thinking about the work we do, and the impact we have on society through it.

Of course, it's very difficult to contemplate this future when we can't really define it.

Are we heading for new job specs, new designations, new jobs entirely?

It's been posited by numerous trend analysts that the most sought-after jobs in 2028 don't yet even exist. Then there are the other transformative forces that will shape the way we work in a decade's time, the most notable of which are almost certain to be the prioritisation of innovation over function; the massive growth of large corporations, but the shrinking of physical work spaces as remote and contract employment arrangements reduce on-site staff counts; and the rising importance of social and environmental sustainability commitments as the essential cornerstones of employee, employer, customer and investor value propositions.

Most analysts broadly agree that these workplace changes are inevitable, but the one area in which futurists appear unable to reach consensus is whether or not the stellar advances in artificial intelligence and automation will mean that, in 10 years' time, robots are performing

the majority of functions currently done by humans in the workplace. While this is understandably a source of worry for those who feel their roles could be done by robots, the fear of robotics advances is typically tempered by the argument that the rise of technology and artificial intelligence will, in fact, create untold new work opportunities. These will, however, be very different in shape, form and function from the jobs most people currently hold.

All of this begs the question:

How can PAs/EAs of today, and the new employees-to-be, ensure that they are prepared for future work roles that can't yet even be clearly defined?

Unfortunately, there's no easy answer. There's also no denying that employers, learning institutions and governments have a vital role to play in helping today's school leavers or graduates become tomorrow's thriving employees.

In what way?

The first, and arguably most important step towards delivering on that responsibility is to focus less on leveraging technology and automation as merely a means to greater profitability, and more on how the workforce of the future might engage with technology for the mutual benefit of corporations and society.

Ultimately, it matters little what the world looks like in 10, or 20 or even 100 years' time. What's really important is that the people who live and work in that world have been equipped to stay firmly in touch with their human-ness. So, while robots may be doing a lot of the work, and the concept of full-time employment for life will probably have become somewhat archaic, the focus of the workplace should, and will, always be on people. More specifically, that focus will need to be on how to best equip and enable employees to engage with technology to achieve the types and levels of outputs that we probably cannot even contemplate today.

Who and what can help achieve this?

Preparing for tomorrow requires a shift in training and education focus, by providing demonstrable ability to

access and leverage knowledge, acquire, adapt and grow skills sets, and engage meaningfully with others and the world at large. Employment criteria has to change accordingly.

By 2025, an agile and innovative human workforce, with a sincere commitment to ethics, sustainability, fairness and the greater good, will ultimately always differentiate the successful future organisation from the failed one.

“ Ultimately, it matters little what the world looks like in 10, or 20 or even 100 years' time. What's really important is that the people who live and work in that world have been equipped to stay firmly in touch with their human-ness. ”

Future PA - manager and master of processes and priorities

The future is not a place where everything changes dramatically. It is a place where small changes in some things have massive impacts on others – but where many things never evolve or decay, because we like them just the way they are. (I know several CEOs who do not do their own email, for example). The things which change significantly (often at a pace which is so rapid it is disruptive) are the processes which people use to accomplish the everyday tasks.

In an office environment, which processes are being disrupted?

We have already seen that people at work (with few exceptions) type their own documents, receive and send their own emails and messages, reserve their own meeting spaces, and book their own flights, hotels and restaurants. Many of the mundane processes which once were delegated to a secretary or a PA are simply easier or faster to do yourself.

As more and more AI comes into the interfaces with airlines and service providers, and as voice interaction becomes the norm, it is easier to ask a system to do something than to have to brief a person. Already we can say “OK Google, book me a flight to Johannesburg on Tuesday which lets me get to Sandton by 10am” then let the system deal with it. Echo, Amazon’s intelligent speaker, has even more sophisticated capabilities!

Facebook’s always-listening chatbot “M” will interrupt a Messenger conversation about

lunch to recommend a restaurant, or offer to add a reminder to your schedule. The processes are increasingly in the flow, not separate side tasks.

Like many intermediaries, PAs risk being made redundant if they do not seek out new ways to add value, and upskill themselves. One area that will become increasingly important will be as both a gatekeeper and a filter.

We are bombarded with more and more “knowledge pieces” essential for keeping up to date with changes in our world. Who has time to distil this, or to determine what is important and what is hype or fluff? We are bombarded with constant “connection requests” from our social networks and requests to meet.

Our corporate silos are crumbling, so we have to deal with more and more people and with issues we previously evaded. We are constantly trying to fit a 100 hour week into 40 hours. And, along the way, we risk losing our humanity.

In many ways, a PA should be a manager of the time and of the priorities of the person they work for! And a master of all the new digitally enhanced processes which bring greater efficiency to the task.

About the Author

Godfrey Parkin:
Digital strategist, marketer, ed-tech pioneer,
futurist, author.

Contact:
godfrey.parkin@britefire.com; britefire.com

Chapter 5

It’s not so much about
who you used to be
as it is about
who you choose to be!

– Sanhita Baruah

Preparing yourself for the year 2025:

DISRUPTING CONVENTIONAL NOTIONS

Featuring:

FOREWORD by futurist Bronwyn Williams (SA)

ANCHOR FEATURE by futurist Srdjan Kupresanin (Austria)

OPINION PIECE by computer scientist Andrew Yan-Tak Ng

FOCUS FEATURE by PA, Mastoora Ramiah, PAFSA’s President, She also interviews:

- Angie Orsmond, PA, CSIR: Defence, Peace, Safety and Security. Angie is president of PAFSA’s Social Club
- Feroza Sader, Executive Personal Assistant, AAAS a Division of Imperial Group Limited; Feroza is chair of PAFSA’s newsletter
- An academic: Joey Staphorst, Nelson Mandela University Business School

LAST WORD by futurist Marli van der Merwe (SA)

Powered by technology and driven by the social value of freedom over security, freelancing and other flexible work programmes are becoming the new normal for most businesses.

The future of work for personal assistants

from PA to VA



By 2020 it is estimated that 40% of the US workforce will be part of the freelance, or 'on demand' economy, that is, only 60% of employees will go to work at an office in a full-time job in exchange for a fixed salary. It will be interesting to know the stats for other countries!

The freelance trend

The freelance trend has been driven by four factors:

- Firstly, the increasing social values of independence and freedom.
- Secondly technology-driven hiring platforms and apps, such as Fiver, connect employees with businesses that offer remote work opportunities all across the world.
- Thirdly, technology, such as high-speed internet and video conferencing software that allows remote workers to work efficiently on their own and with geographically dispersed teams.
- Fourthly, since the 2008 global recession, businesses have focused on cost-cutting initiatives. Remote workers are both more productive and less costly, in terms of office space and infrastructure to employers.

This trend applies to personal assistants too. We are seeing more and more virtual assistant positions advertised. These assistants fulfil the same role as traditional PAs, they just no longer have to work in the same office.

On demand employment

Project and short-term contract work is set to become the new normal. On-demand employment refers to non-salaried micro-contract work, based on the "Uber" employment model. The personal assistant function is easily convertible to an on-demand model. Expect new Uber-type apps and services to arrive to cater specifically to this market.

With on-demand employment, employees only work when there is a demand for their services. Companies only pay for staff, at market-determined prices, when their services are required by the market. This model benefits employers in terms of reduced risk, reduced wage bills, reduced employee benefits (such as no pension schemes) to accommodate and less stringent labour laws to follow – at the expense of employees who are reduced to unprotected commodities with low job security.

Going forward, we can expect governments and labour

departments to start looking closely at these business models, and to see new labour laws rolling out to address some of these labour concerns.

Location independent and remote working

The U.S. Census Bureau found remote working, where employees work outside of the company office in a location of their choice, has grown by 103% since 2005. Seventy-nine percent of millennials would consider quitting their current job to freelance, listing the flexibility to travel and freedom to set their own schedules as driving interests. Nomadic working arrangements suits both time-poor employees and cost-cutting employers.

Employees benefit from reduced commutes, the opportunity to travel while working and more free time to enjoy as they wish.

Companies benefit from reduced office operational expenses – and from increased employee productivity. The Quarterly Journal of Economics found remote employees are up to 13% more productive, feel less distracted and report higher work satisfaction.

"The more talented the individual, the more flexibility they can warrant." - James O' Reilly, Co-Founder NeueHouse

Automation, AI and the displacement economy

The jobs most vulnerable to automation and displacement by artificial intelligence are process and systems related jobs.

Since PAs work in dynamic, personal environments, their roles are less at risk of being automated than those of lawyers, GPs and accountants. Personal human help will become a luxury commodity for the new wealthy class of professionals, made up of tech entrepreneurs and engineers rather than doctors and lawyers.

In short, personal assistants will still have work, even if their bosses are replaced.

About the author

Bronwyn Williams (SA) is a business trends analyst and publisher.

Contact: bronwynruthwilliams@gmail.com; whatthefuturenow.com

Over the next several years, let technology do everything it can within your organisation. Its domain of competence will keep increasing at breakneck pace and it will take one after another from your list of to-dos.

Secretary & Personal/ Executive Assistant of tomorrow

When Ms. Ana-Maria Valente, the Director at PAFSA, very kindly invited me to write up in brief form my thoughts on the future of today's Secretary/PA/EA/Admin Assistant role, I was simultaneously honoured, humbled, inspired and freaked out. To bring enough well thought-out arguments to such an important discussion in less than a thousand words is not a small feat, probably impossible for me.

I do hold a rather radical view on the future of this, and nearly every other, type of work as we understand it today. And it's not good news in an immediately apparent way. But seen from a fresh perspective and with an open mind, I firmly believe that the news is in fact not only good, but amazing.

Becoming the best possible versions of Human

Most of the professions in existence today will diminish or disappear over the next several decades. And thanks to the particularities of the IT revolution, a large majority of them will not be replaced by any new professions the way it happened during, as an example, the industrial revolution.

That will set us free to pursue a much bigger goal than most of the population of the planet ever dreamed of – bettering ourselves and our societies. Becoming the

best possible versions of Human.

The future of work is actually the very topic that nudged me towards futurism as an interest and a field of research.

In 2010, as the seriousness of the development of self-driving vehicles became clear to me, I got worried (an attitude which has evolved quite significantly since). You see, if vehicles drive themselves, we don't need taxi, bus, delivery van or truck drivers. If cars don't spend 90% of their time sitting idly in parking lots, we don't need that many cars. Which means that we don't need as much manufacturing capacity. Nor as many people producing car parts. And so it goes, like a long, branching tree of dominoes, each one that topples pushing another to the floor. That is hundreds of millions of jobs worldwide.

We've had waves of technology augmenting and supplanting human effort before. They always caused temporary upheavals, but eventually people would move up the skill ladder and all would be good again. The human condition improved every time a part of our work was transferred over to technology, but our social contract stayed basically the same – we sell our work for money in order to afford the goods and services we need to live within our context.



We let those unable to join this contract fall through the cracks, to a lesser or greater extent. The context varies wildly from Finland to Bangladesh, but the basics of the social contract are more or less the same.

Well, that's about to change.

The new kind of 'change'

The revolution facilitated by the exponential development of information technology is unlike any before. This time it's not our muscles that are getting augmented and supplanted, but our brains. And this time, the reach of the new technologies is quickly approaching geographic universality and their distribution takes practically no time. Contrast that with the fact that a car is still not

available universally, over a hundred years from its inception.

Also, information technologies are changing practically every industry, from energy production and distribution to medicine, crop and meat farming, already mentioned transport/logistics, manufacturing, retail, banking and financial services. One unifying characteristic of these at first glance unrelated, changes is reduction in necessary resources, by orders of magnitude. Another is massive improvement in the quality of products and services provided.

Continued on next page

How it impacts on your profession

So, how does all this connect with the future of the specific professions we are talking about here? In my mind, the link is two-fold:

- Firstly, there is the overall reduction in the need for human labour. That one is obvious, but will not happen overnight. It will take between ten and thirty years from today (still soon enough for all of us to seriously consider as we're doing our long term planning).
- Secondly, less obvious but more likely to affect the profession in the next two to five years, there is the development of artificial intelligence-based virtual assistants.

Siri was the first widely known virtual assistant. Its (her?) capabilities were pretty laughable at the beginning and aren't much more impressive today, but Siri set the stage for the AI development battle that's raging today. Mostly still behind the scenes, but about to explode onto the world stage in full force.

Google, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, Apple, IBM, the US government and above all China (both the government and several of the largest Chinese companies) are, along with many others, investing billions and vying for dominance in shaping the world of tomorrow.

This is the space race of our time.

And make no mistake about it, the efforts are paying off already and will in a year or two stun everyone not following these developments closely.

No human can possibly translate back and forth between forty or more languages. Monitor stock exchanges or currencies. Keep track of all the airports, all the airlines, all the flights and their combinations, prices, seat availability, transport options at the destination, meeting rooms, hotels, co-working spaces, spas, sights and shops. Figure out the best connections of all of that with a person's needs and deliver it all instantly.

AI can.

In a few short years, we'll have virtual assistants that

(who?) know us better than we know ourselves.

From the type of music we like and that we prefer our Monday appointments to start from 10, rather than 8 am, to how our mood and level of energy change with every type of meal and after different types of exercise we enjoy. They will analyse the tone of our voice and correspondence, possibly heart rate, skin temperature and other physical signals of our bodies, and guide us to being more focused and effective.

The more connected our organisations become, the more efficient virtual assistants will be in helping us stay at the peak of our professional performance.

I'm not talking science fiction here. This is no longer a question of if, or even of when. This is the reality of our near future. As a result of this leap in productivity, hundreds of millions, and then billions, will lose their jobs in the coming decades.

What should we do?

So what should we do about it now? I say, embrace it! Rather than breaking the weaving machinery of today, learn about it, understand it, and use it in our daily work. Organisations which resist (or only half-heartedly implement) the cutting edge of information technology will have no chance whatsoever at being relevant on the global stage.

Fear of the unknown or misunderstood, fear of change – it is a powerful motivator. But it rarely leads to positive outcomes. Fear usually brings about destruction and suffering. So, let's consciously undertake to move in the opposite direction. Let's understand and prepare for the inevitable in a constructive manner. Access to information today is incomparable to any period in history. We can and should use that to our benefit.

You are perfectly positioned!

I'd say that Secretaries, Personal/Executive/Admin Assistants are perfectly positioned to help their organisations realise this and reap the benefits of being among the first-movers.

Start by reading about Amazon Alexa for Business,

following futurist blogs and YouTube postings (London Futurists already have a sizeable archive), Singularity University and tech magazines. The resources are plentiful and free. Learn and then spread the knowledge.

Use the time and energy you gain to focus on the humans around you. Develop and promote understanding and empathy, help inspire joy in cooperation and celebration of achievement.

The giant leap

The technological revolution we're experiencing today can lead to a world of total abundance and close to zero work bourne of necessity. We as a civilisation will need to come up with a new way of distributing the resources of the Earth, which has the potential to be fairer, more socially and environmentally responsible/sustainable than any system we had devised before. Universal Basic Income is one idea for at least a part of such system that's gained in popularity over the past several years and several governments and many NGOs are already experimenting with it. It may serve us as a good temporary/transitional solution.

Each individual could soon become free to explore the limits of their own skills, knowledge, creativity, empathy, contribution to their families and communities.

That is a gigantic leap from today's world in which slavery still exists. It may be difficult to even imagine. But isn't it an image of a world worth living in?

"Well, it's not going to happen..." to read: "Well, it's not going to happen spontaneously. We'll have to contribute as much as we each can. That's why I'm writing these words. And you can start by doing some research and then contributing to the conversation in your organizations and communities. I'm excited about the possibilities and would welcome any opportunity to discuss these issues with you further at www.worldahead.today."

About the author

Srdjan Kupresanin (Austria) : Founder of Vienna Node: Blockchain For The Real World, WorldAhead.today blog and Vienna Futurists

Contact: ssrdjan@vienna-node.eu; meetup.com/vienna-futurists





Benjamin Franklin conducted extensive research in electricity, selling his possessions to fund his work. In June 1752 he is reputed to have attached a metal key to the bottom of a dampened kite string and flown the kite in a storm-threatened sky.

In 1821, English scientist Michael Faraday discovered how to make an electrical current

Many inventors and scientists continued to try find a way to use electrical power to make light. In 1879, the American inventor Thomas Edison was finally able to produce a reliable, long-lasting electric light bulb in his laboratory.

And life was never the same. It heralded a new age for humanity.

Above all, it gave rise to an industry and changed the nature of workplace for ever more.

Imagining life without electricity is almost impossible.

We found it most interesting that Andrew Yan-Tak Ng compares the introduction of AI to our lives to the introduction of electricity. In other words, AI will transform the way we live and work just as dramatically.

Electricity enhanced just about every aspect of living and working and so we should view that AI should do the same – Enhance the quality of our working life and not displace it.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) to be as exciting and positively disruptive as electricity was!

“AI is the new electricity,” said Andrew Ng, co-founder of Coursera and an adjunct Stanford professor who founded the Google Brain Deep Learning Project, in a keynote speech at the AI Frontiers conference that was held in November 2017, in Silicon Valley:

“Electricity transformed every major industry. AI has advanced to the point where it has the power to transform every major sector in coming years.

And even though there’s a perception that AI was a fairly new development, it has actually been around for decades. But it is taking off now because of the ability to scale data and computation.”

Source: <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/ai-new-electricity/>

About the author

Prof Andrew Yan-Tak Ng is a Chinese American computer scientist and entrepreneur. He is one of the most influential minds in Artificial Intelligence and Deep Learning. Ng co-founded and led Google Brain.



■ The future will disrupt notions of what a PA's value is!

Embracing disruption to our role then managing it!

“Being an enabler means that the PA of the future will be in the efficiency-supply driving seat and not just another efficiency cog!”

Let's do some analysis of our profession: The role. We started as typists and telephonists, then note-takers. From passively taking orders to using computers which speeded up work and freed us up to do travel bookings, etc. Then wham-bam the Net arrived! We became more productive because we could do research, and access information and services faster! Email took over the fax and we just became progressively more efficient. Then the mobile phone and mobile technology and apps made communication and accessing even more real-time information a whole lot easier. We have always been using whatever new-fangled technologies came our way, without batting an eye-lid!

The PA has always been a 'doer' – a first port of call for efficient delivery of support services.

The PA has evolved as the supporting technologies evolved.

But now technology such as AI in the form of a Siri, etc. are not 'supporting' or facilitating the work of a PA as much as actually taking over some of the PA's tasks.

Therefore, it is not an evolution but a disruption.

This means that the PA cannot just seamlessly evolve again - but rather has to re-invent the role. By this we mean go from a support service provider to an enabler! Enabling means far more than being a support agent for an executive or multiple executives. Enabler suggests that the PA of 2025 is there to manage and ensure they comply with the daily demands of the executive.

Siri, Alexa, Vera, Sophia, Google Duplex, etc. are the new PAs as such. The Human PAs, such ourselves will get another name as we move to

the enabling role I referred to earlier. Being an enabler means that the PA of the future will be in the efficiency-supply driving seat and not just another efficiency cog!

Another Blueprint contributor has referred to us as being Personal Executives, which suggests that we will need the skills of a manager, as we manage the various nodes of the executive office by enabling cross-communication and enhancing effectiveness.

This is first the major observation:

In the past we were labelled as responsible for 'efficiency'!

In other words, doing *things right* at the right time!

Now, as we head for 2025 we are potentially getting the same label that apply to decision-making executives: 'Effectiveness'!

Which is, doing the *right things* at the right time!

This requires a substantial change to our mindset, as we move from waiting for instructions and requests to supervising and enabling the delivery of 'services' from humans or robots timeously.

The second observation is with regard to our EQ and flexibility:

- Our listening, co-ordination and communication skills have to improve, no matter how good we think we are at the moment.
- Our ability to take stress off our executives and be agile in solving problems becomes even more critical.
- Our availability and flexibility to work from any workspace will be top of the agenda.

Being absolutely adept at learning to use any technological platform is an essential. Starting NOW.

So what does disrupt really mean?

According to Clayton M. Christensen, Michael E. Raynor and Rory McDonald (hbr.org) the first minicomputers were 'disruptive' when they appeared on the scene.

The theory of disruption predicts that when major innovation from a company offers brand new and revolutionary products or services, it tackles its competitors head-on, who then have to speed up their innovations to defend their market positioning.

Resulting in them trying to offer even better services or products at comparable prices.

This is what happened with the introduction of Siri, the artificially intelligent PA produced by Apple. The response was that Amazon created Alexa, Microsoft created Cortana, Google created Google Duplex and Samsung created Vera. These voice-driven assistants can now perform amazing things, some of which are PA like tasks, and have as such caused disruption to our roles.

What PAFSA has done

Christensen, Raynor and McDonald suggest that because of the threat of disruption to the way many of us work – from the executive suite down to manual operators – they believe that companies should create a separate division that operates under the protection of senior leadership to explore and exploit a new disruptive model.

This is precisely what PAFSA has done! As a leading organisation for the PA profession, PAFSA has proactively responded to the threat of technology disruption by analysing our profession and researched its likely future and produced this Blueprint.

Since PAFSA represents the interests of the PA profession, the brief to the PAFSA team was not only to get an understanding of what our PAs were thinking regarding the impact of future technology on our roles, but also to get the attention of our executives by producing a publication that can help us prepare for the future by identifying the challenges as well as the tools of hope while exploring a few likely scenarios we may face in the future.

I interviewed two PAFSA committee members, Angie Orsmond president of PAFSA's social-edutainment club, as well as Feroza Sader, chair for PAFSA's Newsletter. They have very interesting things to say.

Source:

<https://hbr.org/2015/12/what-is-disruptive-innovation>

Mastoora Ramiah is PA at Casinos SA Central Office, Sun International. She is a member of PAFSA's Academy of Excellence and has been PAFSA's President for two years.

An interview
with
**Angie
Orsmond**



Angie Orsmond, PA,
CSIR: Defence, Peace,
Safety and Security

Q *Angie, as technology takes over many of our tasks, how much of your role has already been disrupted? And how much more do you imagine it will be?*

Intelligent Personal Assistants are capable of radically disrupting the way we search for, and consume information on the Internet. The convergence of several trends and technologies has resulted in a new interface through which people will be able to interact with your business.

Our role as Assistants has become far more strategic and leadership focused than ever before. Our Managers need us to be on par with them when it comes to dealing with people, communicating effectively and aligning ourselves with their goals and the objectives of the business. We are after all, the managers of the managers.

“The Role of the PA is one that is often mooted to be at risk from the rise of the robots. In fact, rather than making PAs redundant, Artificial Intelligence is more likely to help complement their role and even add to the overall influence they have within the organisation,” says Jeremy Campbell, Chief Commercial Officer at global HR and payroll provider SD Worx.

I have not experienced a disruption in my role as yet. This could be attributed to my resistance towards new technologies due to ignorance and fear of looking foolish when not fully comprehending new technologies on first introduction. I believe the human interface will remain crucial in the role of PAs albeit supported by ever advancing technology.

How much has technology affected the way your boss works, and how much more do you expect it to be?

Communication channels have increased substantially (for example cellphones, Whatsapp, e-mail, voice notes, video calls, etc.), and this trend is expected to continue to increase. The executive is far more accessible than in the past. Where PAs in the past were the main gatekeeper guarding access to the executive, due to the technology, PAs may not always be part of these different communication channels.

The reality is that work doesn't always happen in a physical office from eight to five, and this trend will surely continue in future.

My executive relies on me to perform PA duties and I do not see that changing in the foreseeable future. Where technology can assist me to complete tasks faster, it is our relationship that determines how I respond to and deliver on tasks and meet (and exceed) my executive's requirements.

What future technological changes will bring for administrative assistants remain to be seen. However, if history is a guide, technology may make administrative professionals even more necessary, not less.

What advice would you give to senior PAs about facing the challenges ahead?

To what extent is your position reducible to frequent high volume tasks and to what extent does it involve tackling novel situations? On frequent high volume tasks, machines are getting smarter but they are not making progress on dealing with novel situations. My advice is to stay relevant, accept challenges, keep the edge and show yourself capable in tackling unique situations by being solutions driven.

PAs still need to prove they're essential as technology evolves. Lifelong learning and training on co-operation skills will become even more important.

The general consensus is to embrace AI technology rather than fear it. Understand how the Intelligent PA can make you more efficient and which tasks can be allocated to the IPA. Research IPA in order to understand the capabilities as well as its limitations. Be armed with knowledge and get a better understanding of what your future unique value proposition is going to be, and focus on enhancing that.

Equally what advice would you give millennial PAs about the way forward?

My advice to millennials is the same as for senior PAs – stay relevant, accept challenges, keep the edge and hone your problem solving skills, while finding ways to use AI to enhance the PA functions. Utilise knowledge of technology of social media to prepare to actively contribute to the PA functions of organisations through the integration of IPAs.

It is imperative that we develop ourselves with a vision of being the ultimate assistant and I highlight a few potential areas of growth:

- Become a specialist and knowledge-based worker in a specific field (e.g. Finance, Projects, HR).
- Learn more management related topics than you would have done previously.

- Have a broad knowledge of your business; have an informed opinion about the future of the organisation.
- Research new technology trends as this is where most of the changes will be taking place.
- Set career goals and make time for your continuous professional development.
- If possible, go on courses or do online training tutorials to understand how the various IPAs work and how they can complement your role.

How should organisations prepare their PAs for the onset of like Siri, Alexa, etc?

Companies differ in their approach to implementing new technology. No one wants to be left behind, although technologies can also quickly become redundant as faster, cheaper products come to market. I believe the human interface will remain crucial in the role of PAs, although supported by ever advancing technology. PAs should be trained to use platforms to enhance their performance and deliverables.

Organisations should become familiar with new technology and explore ways in which AI can be utilised in conjunction with the PA role to increase the efficiency of the organisation.

Be part of the process.

The organisation's responsibility is to:

- Make PAs part of the process to define the organisations strategy on the utilisation of IPAs. By doing that they will obtain the ownership and commitment of the strategy which will accelerate the implementation of the strategy.
- The organisation needs to have a communication and implementation plan.

The latter should include a training plan for PAs. It is important that PAs understand that they should not fear that IPAs will replace them but that IPAs have the potential to increase their efficiency and job satisfaction.

(In answering these questions I used Adam Fidler (www.executiveassistant.org) as a reference.

An interview
with

Feroza Sader



Feroza Sader, Executive
Personal Assistant,
AAAS a Division of
Imperial Group Limited

Q *Feroza, as technology takes over many of our tasks, how much of your role has already been disrupted? And how much more do you imagine it will be?*

As an Executive Assistant to four executives and some line reports, my role has not been hugely disrupted by technology - if anything, I have had to put on roller-skates and create and embrace a mutually beneficial relationship with technology.

Technology has improved the overall quality of my work and has speeded up processes. I have been able to communicate to all levels in our organisation in a number of different ways maximising efficiency and flexibility, including retrieving and sharing information via our intranet portal. Online filing and archiving and going paperless made my work load so much lighter in addition to getting rid of stacks of clutter/filing in my workspace. WhatsApp works wonders for me, I get an immediate response from my executives - decisions are made quickly and changes are implemented in a shorter space of time.

The downside is that I may sometimes forget to take my cell phone with me and when I get back to my desk I would receive a message that says "are you still around?". But those moments are far and few, however, this can sometimes lead to serious pressure in having to be constantly available coupled to the obligation of having to remain constantly connected.

How much has technology affected the way your executive works, and how much more do you expect it to be?

My executives have embraced technology. Tedious tasks are now done faster; if they need changes made to their diaries they will simply send a WhatsApp message or a voice note. Video call facilities and telecom to branch managers have reduced business travel, maximising working days and flexibility, reducing overall costs and freeing up their time to focus on other value add matters. Even interviews are done via Skype.

My executives can now work from anywhere with relative ease.

Our customers' detailed information is now readily available as an app, ASMobi. My executives can keep up to date on how much stock was ordered and what the delivery and payment status is for each customer in real time.

Technology has eliminated the geographical barrier for all customers, branch managers and both local and international suppliers.

What advice would you give to senior PAs about facing the challenges ahead?

As innovation to technology continues to reshape the modern

workplace and the world in general, my advice to senior PAs would be to adapt, keep up and embrace technology because the advantages of technology far outweigh the downsides.

We are living in an age of innovation; Ask yourself the following questions:

"How can I make ME smarter?"

What tools do I need?"

Instead of seeing technology as a threat rather see it as an asset to get the job done.

Equally what advice would you give millennial PAs about the way forward?

Millennial PAs that have totally embraced technology - my advice to them is to be cautious of a few aspects like not losing sight of face-to-face human interaction as opposed to constantly being behind the screen.

Do not lose your social skills and manners and expect everything to be delivered as fast as the internet does. Reduce your time spent on social media.

Multitasking by having a conversation with people while looking down at your phone, writing emails during a lecture, texting while driving, these are all unacceptable! This sort of multitasking has become dangerous and in some instances, fatal.

Technology is a wonderful thing but if we cannot learn how to use it responsibly and in moderation, our future may not be as bright as the screens we are holding.

How should organisations prepare their PAs for the onset of IPAs like Siri, Alexa, etc?

The age of the digital worker is truly here. These IPAs will become companions and advisors and provide confidence to the user. IT Departments should show PAs the specific corporate functional uses of these in facilitating effectiveness.

Remember that the voice-commanded (IPAs) can understand context and tone and respond accordingly, as well as turn a voice note to a written note. I believe, in the future, organisations will provide the devices and set up the apps for their staff.

PAs should embrace that which enhances their status.

“ We are living in an age of innovation, ask yourself the following questions: “How can I make ME smarter?” ”

Q *Joey, how do you imagine this role will evolve by the year 2025?*

The role of the PA will evolve greatly by 2025 due to the expansion of technology. In the years to come, the technical skills of PAs will stretch much further than only working on Microsoft Office – by being able to “fix” base-line technological hick-ups that currently might be handled by IT technicians.

The PA will have to acquire new skills in various digital areas such as social media, video chat, video conferencing, website and database management and cloud-based applications (e.g. file sharing).

The PA must equip herself to become a business partner and not just a “post office” (she/he cannot just wait upon instructions or requests, and then execute them. She / he will need to “think the business”; will need to anticipate situations, as well as put measures in place to alleviate problems before they occur.

The PA will need to act as a “sound board” to the manager, but not just as a “silent” soundboard; instead an “intelligent” soundboard – who can provide input on a broad spectrum of business related issues.

PAs need to become Project Managers – as business is

actually a conglomerate of numerous different projects that are running simultaneously. They need to understand how these projects feed on each other and how they interlink. They need to be calm in nature and be able to “see the bigger picture”. Often managers can get too close to issues so if PAs can provide perspective, they will keep on making a huge contribution towards the working environment.

Gone are the days where PAs attend a “secretarial course” and see this as having a sufficient education – now they need to understand business per se. A formal qualification in Business Administration / Human Resources / etc. will expose them to business principles – equipping them for their role as a “business partner”.

PAs must understand the “self” (Emotional Intelligence), be able to work with the “other” (virtual teams / multi-cultural teams) and be excellent at the “work at hand”. They need to remain calm and collected in this VUCA world (Volatile, Uncertain, Chaotic and Ambiguous) – and learn “coaching skills” – in order to “manage” upwards. In many instances I have experienced that when things are really going crazy, I turn to my PA for perspective – and the combination of her insights and compassion (and in some cases also her assertiveness) greatly assist me in coping with my role as a Senior Manager.

What do you anticipate will change?

With rapid advancements in technology and global business, the role of the PA will change from rigid office hours to a more flexi time.

With technology, it will be easier to work on-the-go from just about any location and PAs will no longer need to be at a fixed office all day. They will be able to connect and collaborate from any workspace, including home.

Where we now traditionally think of work-life balance as two separate entities, we will need to accept that going forward, they will merge into one and we will need to accept that work will sometimes interrupt personal time and vice versa.

Flexibility will be the key in finding some kind of harmony between the two. Standby duties and flexible working hours will no longer be the exception but the rule.

A warning: Life is going to get tougher – and we need a different “breed” of PA. The new PAs are going to have to learn to set boundaries, otherwise they could self-destruct by not having a private life.

What challenges are ahead?

Besides constantly training and upskilling yourself, you will need to better understand your executive’s role to be able to assist with advice on a broad range of issues within the company. As trends constantly

changes, it is imperative that you change with them in order to stay ahead.

Time management is a huge challenge, hence the requirement for a more flexible operating timetable. Not only does the PA have to manage her /his own time and schedule but also manage the schedule of her/his executive and other colleagues in the office.

Another challenge is how to assess difficult situations and make sound decisions whilst maintaining healthy work relations.

What are the uncertainties as well as the tools of hope?

In general, uncertainties can be described as keeping up with a fast changing and uncertain world, world economies which are failing and the lack of ethics in the workplace.

Survival means: Focus only on that which you can control and then practice mindfulness in the workplace. Do not get paralysed by fear, instead focus only on the task at hand. The Human Race is resourceful! We have survived a number of revolutions, each time thinking, “this is the end” – and here we are still!

Human Beings, have been created with special qualities: A robot cannot give you a cuddle; it cannot put a soft hand on your shoulder; it cannot pray for you; it cannot give you a kiss on the cheek and it cannot cry with you. We must embrace the unique qualities that we, as Human Beings have, and actually live these – as some of us are already in danger of becoming “robot-like”!

What scenarios do you envisage in terms of preparation?

In my field of teaching and coaching, technology will also play a dominant role - as is already being experienced with ILVT (instructor lead video training). Fundamental skills and basic training should be made available in preparing learners for the road ahead.

Prospective PAs have to be grounded in order to cope. They must understand themselves and be equipped with the necessary coping skills in order to not only live/work with others but live/work with “themselves”! They must re-learn the ancient art of “connectivity” – with real human beings! Intercultural communication, conversational skills and coaching skills are all vital to survive.

Tomorrow's workforce will need to be innovative in order to stand out, make a difference and survive - hence, it is imperative to develop the ability to focus and think, to reason and solve problems innovatively. consider an option to being employed, which is to be entrepreneurs and business owners. The PA of the future will be more like a manager within the office.

An interview
with
**Joey
Staphorst**



Joey Staphorst is Senior
Manager: Innovation
& Development (Tender Unit &
Accreditation Unit)
Nelson Mandela University
Business School

There is a new generation PA on the block

Together with the shift in business environments and mindsets of employees, PAs are moving towards a digital and connected business environment.

Say goodbye to the perception of coffee runs, answering phone calls and picking up dry cleaning – and say hello to the new rising role of a PA! The future of work is here. Baby boomers are aging out and the Millennial Generation and Generation X are taking over.

Millennials are family and lifestyle focused. They invest in both career activities and leisure activities with a “work to live” attitude and are opposite to the “live to work” attitudes of the Baby Boomers.

This forces business to shift from confined and defined spaces to virtual and collaborative spaces. There is no doubt that Personal Assistants have a critical contribution to the success of an executive.

How will this shift impact the future role of PAs?

If we take a glimpse into the future, technology will not change what modern PAs do, but will alter the way in which things are done!

Personal Assistants’ technical skills will stretch far beyond Microsoft Office and will encompass digital skills such as website and database management, cloud based applications, and social media.

Another emerging trend is Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning which will change this sector but the key here is balance.

The future power of Personal Assistants lies within the use of technologies such as Machine Learning while driving it with the human element to offer the best possible services.

Say hello to the future

Personal Assistants will be equipped to gather information, analyse it, obtain valuable information but most significantly PAs will gain knowledge through this process. It is said that knowledge is power. Therefore, I believe that PAs will evolve into a role that cannot be shaken by changing factors.

Specifically, PAs will shift from being a right-hand person for an executive to being the oxygen that an executive cannot function without.

The Millennial Generation and Generation X are demanding and independent individuals who will disrupt conventional notions. Look out; there is a new PA on the block who thrives on change, collaboration and individualism.

About the author

Marli van der Merwe is an Analytical Creative Futurist.

Contact: marlivandermerwe@hotmail.co

Chapter 6

Challenges are what make
LIFE INTERESTING
Overcoming them is what makes
LIFE MEANINGFUL
– Joshua J. Marine

Preparing yourself for the year 2025:

ARE WE HEADING FOR NEW DESIGNATIONS?

Featuring:

FOREWORD by futurist Rohit Talwar (UK), together with Alexandra Whittington, Steve Wells, April Koury, Maria Romero, and Karolina Dolatowska of Fast Future

ANCHOR FEATURE by futurist Ruben T Miller (SA)

OPINION PIECE by futurist Flavio Liberal (Brazil)

FOCUS FEATURE by PA, Heidi Stiger, South Africa's PA of the Year 2017. She also interviews:

- Simone Muller PA, The Clicks Group
- Michelle Whitaker, Executive PA, Sanlam Investments
- An academic: Dr Morne Mostert, Stellenbosch University

LAST WORD by founder of Practically Perfect PA, Nicky Christmas (USA)

Yes, AI personal assistants will likely take on the more routine tasks away from human executive assistants - in fact, this is already transpiring. However, in the future, admin jobs filled by human workers shall not be completely erased: Humans will be available, but at a premium.

The More Things Change, the Better it Gets!

Are Administrative/Executive Assistants (EA)/Personal Assistants (PA) already living in the future as new technology hits the workplace?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is one of the most disruptive technologies affecting today's business environment. Explosive developments, funding and support for increasing the role of AI in all sectors, and across all job roles seem to be a key driver of the future of business.

The impact of AI over the next decade is expected to completely transform the landscape, and no industry, or job, will be left untouched.

Jobs are among the chief concerns whenever the topic of AI is mentioned.

Most people have by now heard that "robots are coming" for jobs, and that mass unemployment is "inevitable" in our collective future. But, some jobs could be transformed for the better with the rise of smart technologies making routine work easier, allowing people to focus on the job elements that they can really add value to.

For that reason, we suggest that:

The Administrative/Executive Assistant (EA)/Personal Assistant (PA) of 2025 will not be replaced by technology, but rather, enhanced by it.

In many ways, the future is already here. Though the Admins/EAs/PAs are indeed job roles which are already

being affected by AI, there is ample evidence to show that the future outlook is actually quite good as a benefit of smart technology.

With that said, it is impossible to know for sure which jobs will be eliminated within the next 10 years. However, given the quickly changing technological conditions, and with AI evolving every single day, it seems that if the Admins/EAs/PAs role remains on the job market in 2025, AI will change it significantly, and for the better.

Even more exciting, it is possible that AI will create more occasions in Admin/EA and PA work where the requirement to demonstrate uniquely human skills and capabilities will be emphasised over technology.

All this points to a potentially exciting transformation for the Admin/EA/PA role.

The Past

Technology has already radically changed the role of the Admins/EAs/PAs over the last 10 years. The changes have been even more significant than the introduction of personal computers and the smartphone combined, but possibly less obvious. A close look at the sort of things the admin job holder used to do exclusively, like typing memos and letters, scheduling meetings, booking travel, and making reservations shows that technology has already impacted substantially on nearly all of those tasks.



The Present

The responsibilities which Admins/EAs/PAs are likely to perform include acting as a first point of contact, dealing with correspondence and phone calls, managing diaries and organising meetings and appointments.

At times the job can even involve controlling access to a manager or executive. Another key area includes booking and arranging travel, transport and accommodation.

Already, several applications and systems exist which can take over some of those tasks. For example, x.ai personal assistant can help schedule meetings. Voice recognition typing software can be used to send messages without Admins/EAs/PAs involvement.

Voice recognition has replaced the need to type just about anything; an AI not only records the words spoken, but also optimises grammar and any emphasis required.

It also translates any message into an alternative language, in real time if required.

The Future: The Admin/EA/PA of 2025

The admin positions will require more specialised training where people skills, insightful knowledge in specific domains and counselling would meet. The employees in these roles might also need to efficiently interact with AIs and augmented humans, which is a new skill that many people would have to learn in any job in 2025.

Gaining a better understanding for data is another area where Admins/EAs/PAs may have to adapt to the role of AI in their jobs.

For example, seamless data flows will allow AI tools to access the diaries of multiple colleagues and perfectly schedule meetings, freeing the employee to focus on more important, human-centric tasks like personally following up with important clients. It may be important to increase the understanding of data analytics among some Admins/EAs/PAs to know when to apply a human touch.

Continued on next page

Technical knowledge to complete most tasks may become unnecessary, but a clear understanding of the limitations and capabilities of big data might give some workers an edge. Furthermore, programming skills (at least a fundamental understanding) could give some in the role the advantaged ability to customise how the data gets crunched, personalising the benefits of technology to their client or projects.

As an example of how to use AI to enhance the human element at work:

Imagine a specialised meeting planning algorithm that uses basic information about a meeting (attendees, venue options, timing, and catering requirements).

An AI-powered digital assistant could access the required attendees' diaries and public personal data, resolve any conflicts, make the room reservation, and automatically order the appropriate catering.

In this scenario, the detailed leg work being done by AI should help avoid any mistakes or errors on the financial and logistical side, while a human employee overseeing the entire process would be there to provide a personal touch as needed. It is even possible that algorithmically-curated seating arrangements designed to avoid personality clashes among meeting attendees, based on insights drawn by trawling participants' social media accounts could become common place.

AI is evolving so quickly that, within a few years, there could be similar applications which book the travel and hotels for executives intuitively.

Within ten years a digital assistant could:

- Do everything to meet travel and hotel preferences of the executive including airline, flight times, departure and arrival airport, transfers, hotel chain.
- All while maximising traveller reward schemes during the reservation and payment.
- All that would be needed to do is for a admin to determine when, where and for how long the business executive would like to travel and input all requirements to one device (like Alexa or Google smart).
- The smart AI assistant would find the best option available for the price.
- Passport details and payment would be already saved in the system.
- Once the AI generated a list of available options, arrangements would be approved by a human assistant, then AI could make the booking.

Rather than perform rote tasks in this future, Admins/EAs/PAs are the conduit for AI that can intuitively

anticipate needs and maximise benefits/minimise cost and inconvenience. The objective for admins in this future is not to make travel arrangements, but to make sure there's a world-life and human-machine balance.

Specialisation for human PAs

Another change we may see is development of careers within one single industry, as it becomes key for Admins/EAs/PAs to know the business inside out.

So, there might be a job opening for "finance PA" or one that works exclusively with food industry executives. Specialisation to the industry would be a by-product of the fact that people in the role place increasing emphasis on relationships. If most routine information is being handled by AI, the future of work in these jobs is really about people skills. Also, specialised knowledge and experience could be highly valued, perhaps ensuring abundant job offers that revolve around one field.

Work on call

Another twist in the future of admin jobs could be that Admins/EAs/PAs work on call and become paid

for specific tasks. Temporary workers or fill-ins on the job could use AI to access or "upload" the knowledge base and even institutional memory and history about what they need to know to cover for a specific person, say in the case of maternity leave.

This line of developments follows the trends toward the sharing economy and taskification, embodied by Uber, AirBnB and Task Rabbit – disruptors whose time has come (and possibly gone), although their imprint on future business models may linger. Admins/EAs/PAs may experience better job prospects in the gig economy, although work stability would be an issue. It is possible that Admin/EA/PA work would become a "side job" in the face of massive unemployment cuts, similar to the Uber driver or task worker.

Working remotely

One wider social trend driving the future of Admins/EAs/PAs employment is that the job market and people's perception of the work environment has changed massively in past years. Telecommuting numbers keep rising: every year more directors and managers prefer to work at home or remotely than commute to crowded offices.

Assuming this trend continues to grow over the next 10 years, would more people working remotely in the future reduce number of admins needed in the workforce? Or increase the potential for admin employment due to flexibility and possibly taking on multiple clients, projects and roles?

Opening doors for entrepreneurship

There may be good potential for entrepreneurially-minded entrants to Admin/EA/PA work, which may serve as a form of insurance in terms of employment instability wrought by artificial intelligence, maybe using AI to help deliver effective and human contract admin support to executives in the form of a company with sector-experienced PAs offered to client companies on a fee per task basis.

Conclusion

The dominant trajectory for the future is where technology continues to undertake the more transactional type of work, and the future Admin/EA/PA is the executive's relationship manager. In this future, the same way that many products and services have been commoditised and the premium value is in human to human relationships, the admin is focusing on relationships both inside and outside the organisation.

Today's PA is already at a point where he or she has become fully representative of the executive's brand and the organisation's reputation.

The skill set required by the job seems remarkably similar to that required by today's successful executives. Listening, reasoning, collaborating, working in complex and uncertain situations, and empathy are critically important as Admins/EAs/PAs work to provide a more sophisticated type of support to the executive.

PAs are no longer co-ordinators of a small compartment of business activities, but a relationship builder, a relationship developer and a partner to the executive. Ironically, the interpersonal skills required of people in these roles are becoming more essential as the job duties themselves are alleviated by technology tools. Tapping into the human element on the job will be what sets the Admin/EA/PA of the future apart from its AI rivals.

The authors are futurists with Fast Future.

Rohit Talwar is a global futurist, keynote speaker, author, and CEO of Fast Future.

Alexandra Whittington is the foresight director at Fast Future. She is a futurist, writer, and faculty member on the Futures programme at the University of Houston.

Steve Wells is the COO of Fast Future and an experienced Strategist, Futures Analyst, and Partnership Working Practitioner.

April Koury is a foresight researcher, writer, and publishing director at Fast Future.

Maria Romero is a futurist and foresight researcher with Fast Future.

Karolina Dolatowska is the service manager at Fast Future.

Contact: rohit@fastfuture.com

PA and EA roles have evolved in a digitally-connected business environment, and the evolution will continue as artificial intelligence-led automation becomes mainstream in the future.



Your Future Role and reasons to be hopeful

The contribution of secretaries, executive assistants (EAs) and personal assistants (PAs) to business success is hailed in today's highly collaborative and globalised landscape. Besides the competency to carry out tasks that define their role, PAs and EAs can also add value by going above and beyond the call of duty, supporting business development, reviewing and improving existing processes and systems, and providing assistance in other areas, such as training colleagues in a tool or lending a hand with staff hires.

But the role is evolving dramatically...

What could change?

Businesses may start using AI or sophisticated tools that take meeting notes, coordinate appointments, organise files and create reports. AI personal assistants like Knowmail may also release human secretaries from email management duties.

Working across time zones and increased use of virtual collaboration tools, such as Google Hangouts, Slack, Mailbird, teleconferencing and Yammer, will require the multigenerational workforce – from Baby Boomer and Gen X to Gen Y and millennial PAs and EAs – to get more comfortable around new technologies.

Managers and their assistants may work side by side to meet strategic goals in organisations that embrace lateral leadership.

What challenges will the changes pose?

Businesses may focus on hiring experienced PAs with industry experience, a keen understanding of their manager's role, and an easy familiarity with new technologies and industry trends.

- The work of assistants may be done in teams, requiring moving between project teams and performing tasks on a need-basis. Responsibilities may not be carved in stone, calling for a flexible and open-minded approach to 'doing work'.
- The career path for this community of talent may be exciting or uninspiring depending on who they work for. Some businesses may offer new learning and career opportunities in management or supervisory roles, enabling a sideways move to a different

discipline. Others may simply promote them to a senior position where they have to do more of what they're currently doing.

- The demands of a globalised workplace and move to automated processes may require secretaries and PAs to engage themselves in activities that require qualified human presence. That could mean anything from travelling more and/or often, to adjusting working hours to fit a global context.

What are the reasons to be hopeful?

The AI threat is overblown; human intelligence, warmth, intuition and capacity for ethical reasoning can never be replaced by robots, regardless of how many humanoid 'Sophtias' are designed.

Besides, no matter how intelligent or efficient a robot, it is impossible for one to be well-versed in knowledge, events and history specific to a business.

- PAs, secretaries and executive assistants have the opportunity to leverage new time-saving tools while specialising in new fields such as corporate reputation management, project management and global corporate communications, to name some.
- In an era of shifting priorities, organisations will be willing to sponsor continuing education and move secretaries up and into a different discipline within the organisation, underscoring the strategic importance of hiring and retaining talented individuals in these roles.

About the author

Ruben T Miller

Trends Speaker. Business Strategist. Entrepreneur.

Having owned & operated multiple businesses over the last 20 years, he draws from a wealth of experience to coach business leaders to better position their businesses for long term success in a future that is changing faster and faster.

Want to find out how to position your company to rapidly grow Market Share and Profits?

Contact Ruben: www.businessstrends.co.za

An outlook for the year 2025 means an outlook that is a mere 7 years from now. Although it doesn't seem that long away we need to remember that we are living in exponential times i.e. The speed of change is being made at an exponential rate.

A new mindset for the PA



We can bet that a lot is expected to happen in the decade ahead, and much of it with regard to the technology and its transformation and intrusion in the workplace.

Let's begin with the notion that the more repetitive (and less creative) is a task the more likely it will become automated i.e. repetitive tasks will soon be executed by machines.

What does this mean for the role of Executive Assistant?

Some tasks will be automated in the future but I do not believe the whole role will be done away with. The role

will see Executive Assistants becoming more strategic in the way they work with an executive and this will require a new mindset! It will be this new approach that will see them succeed in the future.

The pace of innovation is accelerating as never experienced before. The changes are coming from technological disruptions that we refer to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Let's consider some examples:

- recent increase of news about the autonomous car,
- 3d printing,
- biotech and
- virtual reality.

But, the most disruptive innovation for sure is

- Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Opinions about the impact and development of AI may vary from expert to expert. But, the common denominator among them is the view is that the impact will be substantial enough to change our social interactions.

Consequently, the future of any profession is based on how its practitioners will be able to accept and adapt to the technology coming their way!

Adaptability is the first skill you need to develop!

In a world of great change and uncertainties, the ability of being ready and willing to adapt to new career demands is clearly your most valuable professional asset. Tasks such as taking notes or managing agendas will not be required of you for much longer.

Allied to adaptability, the importance of skills such as:

- critical thinking
- communication
- empathy
- technology readiness and
- self/team/project management

will be the key tools for one to succeed.

Being less burdened by repetitive tasks and available for creative ones is desirable for any professional not only now, but always so – as exemplified by the past three other Industrial Revolutions where machines have been introduced to automate work done by human hands and freeing time to be used for thinking and creating.

Those who don't adapt easily or willingly will bar themselves from career and growth opportunities. That's why I highlighted the skill of adaptability – as well as the others mentioned above – as the cornerstone of your success as you go in to the next decade.

Equally important is for you to be aware of trends and signals of transformation around you.

Familiarise yourself with latest tools available that can simplify your work as well as the work of those in your team.

“The future of any profession is based on how its practitioners will be able to accept and adapt to the technology coming their way.”

Remember the skill I mentioned: 'technology readiness'? Use it as your ally, not your rival. Staying relevant is a key attribute of a professional Executive Assistant.

Futurists, such as myself, play a role in trying not only to anticipate scenarios but also and most importantly, we are trying to build a desirable future.

AI and all other forthcoming innovations will disrupt our lives, so it is up to each one of us to make those decisions that can keep us in a position where the future is not frightening but rather exciting as we keep our survival in mind – a mindset ready to embrace the future.

About the author

Flavio Liberal is a Futurist thinker and Educational Entrepreneur focused on exponential technologies and social disruption impacts for Global Grand Challenges (especially in work and education).

Contact: flaviolib@gmail.com

(Reference <https://www.physicsforums.com/threads/what-does-living-in-exponential-times-mean.717907/>).



PAs are extensions of their executives and ideally they work together as a closely-knit team, and I foresee this kind of support becoming even more important.

At the very least, executives will require a timekeeper and gatekeeper, which are crucial functions, especially with technology becoming more invasive and the potential of being constantly inundated with information – just think of the impact hand held devices have had on our lives over the past few years.

One can only expect this to escalate with new technology.

Facing a potential change to the EA/PA designation

“ What IPAs lack (for how long, I am not sure) are the very human interactive skills that make PAs effective ”

Making predictions around the impact of technology is a lot more complicated than one thinks as there are so many factors that need to be taken into account, for example: technical and regulatory issues; ethics; bias; liability; compliance; governance; privacy and confidentiality concerns (for example the potential for AI to record private conversations and to what extent this information can be used, by whom and the ownership thereof). There is also cybercrime, security, cross-border implications, data leaks and data integrity to consider, with the recent scandals around data privacy at Facebook and prevalence of fake news in the media highlighting just how easy it is to manipulate, misuse and abuse data. It is complicated!

Having said all that, there is no denying that we need to prepare ourselves for disruption in the workplace as technology is advancing at a rapid rate, in particular with regards to automation and AI.

Although historically the consensus seems to be that automation appears to have created more and not fewer jobs, however, just mentioning the

phrase “The Fourth Industrial Revolution” strikes terror in the hearts of many and for good reason. According to a research report by Accenture Consulting entitled “Creating South Africa’s Future Workforce” they predict that as many as 5.7 million (35%) South African jobs are at risk due to automation. However, Accenture also believes that the answer is “Instead of being replaced by machines, humans must learn to collaborate with machines to enhance their own productivity and ingenuity.”

Making friends with machines

“We must learn to ‘run with the machine’.” This outlook is key to the success of evolving and redefining the PA role in a world impacted by technology.

With this in mind, I was keen to get an understanding as to how my peers in the PA field perceive this future digital age; what I can learn from their insights; and how this could potentially translate into evolving roles, thereby influencing new designations.

Executive Assistants, Michelle Whitaker and Simone Muller believe there will be a need for assistant-type roles in the future, although this will vary depending on the executive’s requirements and the operational environment, and clearly the role itself will largely be shaped by and rely heavily on technology (their full responses are set out on the ensuing pages).

Is the IPA a threat to the PA?

I would like to address what is possibly considered to be the greatest threat to the PA profession – the rise of Intelligent Personal Assistants (IPAs) such as Siri (Apple), Google Assistant, Cortana (Microsoft), Alexa (Amazon) and Bixby (Samsung).

Although there are some fears around the prediction that IPAs are set to be utilised in the workplace, I don’t believe one can fully equate utilising an IPA to all aspects of the PA role.

Looking specifically at IPAs, let us take a practical example such as organising something in the diary. This is not as straightforward as it may seem.

There are many unwritten rules that need to be taken into account when scheduling, such as the executive’s

personal and social preferences, company hierarchy, prioritising based on any number of factors – some of which are intangible and can’t be programmed. It often comes down to using one’s judgement and negotiation. Scheduling is so much more than just finding a gap in the diary, which Siri can no doubt do, but what it cannot do (as yet) is all that is entailed in effectively managing the diary. Although this is only one aspect of the PA role, it revolves around the biggest and most critical resource the executive has – their time.

What IPAs lack (for how long, I am not sure) are the very human interactive skills that make PAs effective – communication, collaboration, using one’s judgement and discretion in prioritising work, negotiating and influencing others, troubleshooting and putting a whole host of moving parts together with various stakeholders to facilitate specific outcomes. Not to mention, building strong relationships and networks, coordinating projects, understanding the business and their executive’s professional and personal priorities, all of which needs to be wrapped up in a nice bow of diplomacy and sensitivity in a culturally diverse workplace.

The debate in question

Yes there will be disruption. The debate is whether or not an entire profession, including the PA function, will be replaced by technology, and if so to what extent. What technology has typically done, is provide tools that enhance the PA’s ability to offer a customised service to effectively support and manage their executive.

We have seen in the past that PA roles tend to naturally evolve over time and incorporate advances in technology, from the typewriter to the word processor, which gave PAs an opportunity to diversify their role. This also reflects the views of the executives at Clicks that there is an opportunity for PAs to become subject matter experts with the role evolving into an office manager function, where critical thinking skills such as sound judgement and managing priorities and risk are key, as well as potential for the role to become less administrative and more specialised, with an emphasis on relationship management.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

With the rise of voice technology such as voice activated assistants (IPAs), voice-to-text, voice-to-image and voice-to-video as predicted by Dr Morne Mostert (Director of Institute for Futures Research, Stellenbosch University), how do we ensure that PAs do not lose their voice?

Dr Mostert suggests that PAs will need to “combine human qualities with technology integration” and envisage synergies between human, virtual and hologram assistants. The key is the integration between human and machine skills to enhance the overall integrated performance of the executive, the PA and the machine.

THE PA OF THE FUTURE

How will all this spell out for us?

Based on my research, input received as well as personal conclusions here are a few potential scenarios of the future PA which may, in turn impact designations:

- Specialised PAs with an emphasis on project co-ordination, office and relationship management.
- Given the trend of working remotely, there may be an increase in virtual assistants – self-employed assistants providing remote freelance support to a number of different clients.
- There may be a market for more temping/contracting roles especially for smaller companies, with assistants working onsite but having more than one client, including on-demand PAs.
- A combination of human, virtual and hologram assistants working together, where PAs would delegate, coordinate and supervise the function.
- The role possibly bringing in more of the personal customised support aspect (think fitbit type biochemical information available in the workplace).

As Executive Assistant, Michelle rightly says, this is not a one-size-fits-all scenario. Personally, I see this as an opportunity to make our mark and for us to further develop our roles.

As PAs, we already have what it takes to stay relevant. We are masters at learning, growing and adapting as we continue to find new and smarter ways of supporting our executives. We are resilient and resourceful, and know how to collaborate. We just need to position ourselves to collaborate with technology.

Dr Mostert beautifully sums it up “Artificial intelligence and other automation will most certainly disrupt this role. But the key insight is this: the best way for humans to compete with machines, is to behave like humans”.

How does this all relate to potential designations?

For now, particularly as it pertains to the PA field, there will still be a need for certain generic titles, although this may change as roles become more specialised. As for me, the way the world of work is heading, the most suitable (and telling) designation that comes to mind is Human PA (HPA), and I think it will be one we can be proud of.

However, some potential designations are:

- Virtual Assistant,
- Virtual Personal Manager
- Virtual Process Co-ordinator,
- Personal Executive,
- Personal Manager
- Project Co-ordinator and
- Process Manager to name a few.

When all is said and done let us stay human in a world where technology is pervasive – and our humanness and all it encompasses will be our strongest contribution.

“As PAs, we already have what it takes to stay relevant. We are masters at learning, growing and adapting as we continue to find new and smarter ways of supporting our executives.”

Article Sources:

www.thepva.com/future-executive-assistants/

<http://executivesecretary.com/the-evolving-role-of-the-administrative-professional/>

<https://www.ft.com/content/9420a7b0-d159-11e4-98a4-00144feab7de>

<https://officedynamics.com/administrativeclerical-will-technology-replace-the-administrative-assistant/>

<http://work.chron.com/trends-administrative-jobs-21149.html>

<https://officedynamics.com/the-future-of-the-administrative-profession/>

www.cmswire.com/digital-worplace/7-technology-trends-shaping-the-digital-worplace/

<https://chatbotslife.com/the-rise-and-growing-pains-of-the-personal-digital-assistants-4172d7ce1275>

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170522-how-automation-will-affect-you-the-experts-view>

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/12/predictions-for-freelance-work-education>

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/11/a-robot-might-not-take-your-job-but-youre-going-to-have-to-work-alongside-them>

https://www.accenture.com/t20180201173907Z_w_/za-en/acnmedia/PDF-70/Accenture-Creating-South-Africa-Future-Workforce.pdf?lang=en

https://blog.prialto.com/will_ai_cost_executive_assistants_their_jobs

<https://hbr.org/2011/05/the-case-for-executive-assistants>

<https://www.re-work.co/blog/the-age-of-personal-assistants-more-machine-learning-less-hand-crafting>

<https://www.salesforce.com/au/blog/2017/10/the-future-of-work--technology--jobs-and-augmented-intelligence.html>

<https://www.ft.com/content/9420a7b0-d159-11e4-98a4-00144feab7de>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_of_things

<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/06/when-will-alex-google-assistant-and-other-chatbots-finally-talk-us-real-people>

<https://techcrunch.com/2017/08/25/putting-the-voice-assistant-speaker-craze-in-context/>

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170522-how-automation-will-affect-you-the-experts-view>

https://www.ted.com/talks/sebastian_thrun_and_chris_anderson_the_new_generation_of_computers_is_programming_itself#t-146005

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jun/26/jobs-future-automation-robots-skills-creative-health>

<https://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/future-of-organizations-and-work/what-is-the-future-of-work>

<https://medium.com/artificial-intelligence-policy-laws-and-ethics/the-ai-landscape-ea8a8b3c3d5d>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/adigaskell/2017/12/05/what-jobs-will-emerge-in-the-future-of-work/#2d1f064e2199>

Heidi Stiger is an EA at the Sanlam Investment Group where she was awarded the company's title: PA of the Year for the Sanlam Group 2016.

In 2017, Heidi was awarded South Africa's PA of the Year title. She is a member of PAFSA's Academy of Excellence and acted as Assistant Editor for this edition of the Blueprint publication.

An interview
with

**Simone
Muller**



Simone Muller
PA at
The Clicks Group

Q Simone, how do you imagine the PA role will evolve by the year 2025? What do you anticipate will change regarding the way we view work?

Executives are the visionaries of an organisation and the PA's work is to create the environment allows them to thrive. To me this means that, as the role and context of our Executives changes, so too do our skill sets and the way we work need to change.

The role of a PA was previously categorized by the managing of diaries, administration, running errands and adhoc duties. The PA role in 2025 will be less diary management and more project management. Given how the world is evolving, PA's will need to become more skilled in managing resources, coordinating multiple priorities and dealing with conflicting interests. These are skills sets that were not typically part of a PA's role but evidently becoming much more critical

PA's will need to have better insight and understanding of the industry they are working in or their executives role. In fact, I see more and more PA roles being advertised with a specific industry knowledge requirement.

Critically, PA's fulfil an essential role as a sounding board; as the interface between the Executive and all of their stakeholders, we can greatly contribute to company perceptions.

PA's will need to have a better understanding of brand management. We represent the brand of our executives and therefore will need to develop our skills as it relates to how we portray ourselves, our image and levels of competence.

Then of course, there is the impact of technological advances which is probably the biggest change we will need to adapt to. Employers are already asking for technical skills that stretch far beyond our typical MS proficiencies.

It is clear to me that in order to remain valuable and indispensable the PA of tomorrow will need to be someone who is multi-faceted yet specialized in the area they support. We would therefore be required to not only diversify our portfolios but upskill ourselves in the areas we support through relevant and fit for purpose training, seminars or workshops.

What are the uncertainties as well as the tools of hope ?

The biggest uncertainty is how technology will evolve and impact the way we do things. The hope, however, is that the role will not become obsolete, instead it will grow and expand in a way that adapts to the organisational changes.

The key to staying relevant is being adaptable and not looking at technology as an obstacle but rather as a means to enable our capabilities and improve our efficiency in all areas.

What are your thoughts on the challenges ahead? What challenges are ahead for our executives and how can we help?

Our Executives will be stretched even more and the PA's roles will be to ensure we are capable of meeting the requirements of our Executives. The challenge for the PA will be to take a proactive approach to their personal development, ensuring they keep abreast of new technologies, advancements and capabilities.

I spoke and their opinions, respectively, are:

- That the role will become one where PAs will be required to be an SME (Subject Matter Expert) in the areas in which they provide support, i.e. be technically savvy and be part of customer/ stakeholder engagement. The PA role will evolve into more of an office manager than a PA. PAs will use their judgement more and escalate only when required.
- The role will evolve into a less administrative one as companies invest in more technology. The role will also become more knowledge-based with emphasis on research and specialisation in the areas PAs of the future support. Specialisation will also allow for an enhanced career path progression, for example: support in an HR area means progression in the HR field.
- The role will be more of a relationship management one, rather than simply offering administrative support.

“ To remain valuable and indispensable, the PAs of tomorrow will need to be multi-faceted ”

In the
words of

**Katerina
Novoseltseva**

**“AI will become a positive net job
motivator**

**Many people worry about AI in our
lives as they think that at the
end robots will replace people
and we won't have jobs.
But according to Forbes, In 2020,
AI will become a positive net job
motivator, creating 2.3M jobs while
eliminating only 1.8M jobs. And
we are talking about 2020, just
in 2 years time, so let's see what
opportunities it can bring us in 30
years.”**

An interview
with

Michelle Whitaker



Executive PA
at Sanlam Investments

Q Michelle, how do YOU imagine our role to be around the year 2025? What do you (fear, hope, anticipate) will change?

There is currently a significant amount of headway being made in the IPA space (Intelligent Personal Assistants) such as Apple's Siri, Microsoft's Cortana and Amazon's Alexa that will not only impact the current "Human" PA but many other professions and a lot sooner than we think. I anticipate a future where there will be a greater need for "On Demand PAs". Especially if a large variety of PA/admin functions can be fulfilled by an IPA. I see us working for a number of organisations simultaneously rather than working for one large organisation.

Although having said that, I still feel that the interactive skill set a human PA has is also motivation enough that we will hopefully, always have a certain role to play in an Executive environment. I guess our greatest fear will be that the IPAs will eradicate or severely moderate the need for human PAs, by providing constant assistance, 24/7, at the push of a button and thus presenting a challenge for a human PA to feel the need to also be available around the clock and therefore find it more difficult to switch off. This change of pace is therefore much faster and much wider in scope. We can only hope that within this futuristic move of technology that more jobs are created than what may fall away.

What are your thoughts on the challenges ahead? What are the uncertainties ahead as well as the 'tools of hope' for us?

Our roles will change and it would be foolish to think otherwise. How we adapt to that change is critical. We will need to diversify our careers. It will be crucial to stay on top of technological changes and understand how best to succeed in working "together" and leverage off one another. The move to IPA will suit certain types of managers in certain types of businesses. This is not going to be a one type fits all scenario. There may well be a large majority that will prefer to keep both and make them work for him on two separate levels in order for him not to lose that "human" touch and interaction that would occur with complete transference.

With the advancement in technology, PAs will be able to play a more virtual PA role, working from home or the coffee shop around the corner. This will eliminate the extent of office space a company requires (saving the company money), reduce the amount spent each year on travelling to and from work and the stress involved in the commute (saving the employee money and reducing anxiety levels of the employee), provide more flexibility for the working parent (less strain on the family as a whole) and considerably reduce one's carbon footprint.

As we stand here today the whole world is changing faster than it ever has in its history. One of the catalysts for this rapid change is the emergence of new technology in all sectors. This is an opportunity

that everyone needs to be geared up for today and in the future. This is not unique to any sector or role and therefore the role of a PA will have to change but more importantly the skills required will change.

As you know, the Intelligent PA market is already well developed and is equipping human PAs with more effective tools to complete their tasks. Although this has been an enhancement of the role, the reality is that the skill required for such change has to do with the ability to adapt to new technologies, and embrace the change to excel in that new environment.

I expect future PAs to have an inquisitive mind, be adaptable, be tech savvy without necessarily being an IT expert, have the ability to explore new technologies and create a smart office solution for the person/people they will be responsible for. So in the future I expect the PA role to be one more akin to that of a designer/architect that designs a home to be ergonomic, efficient, custom built for a client - by that I mean the PA will have multiple "clients" being serviced, including the set-up and maintenance of a smart office.

How is your boss/organisation handling the future onset of AI?

As an organisation we are exploring AI by dipping a toe in the water in a couple of places. We have invested in platforms geared for AI and used AI in some of our products and solutions. We are also investing heavily in BI type technology to understand our data. It is a space we are exploring but do not have a fixed strategy around this as yet.

Q Dr Mostert, How do you imagine this role will have evolved by the year 2025?

Artificial intelligence and other automation will most certainly disrupt this role. But the key insight is this: The best way for humans to compete with machines, is to behave like humans.

What do you anticipate will change?

Voice will become a much greater feature of the PA-Executive relationship. Support requirements from the Executive will be expressed by voice into audio receptors that will not require physical phones. Executives will receive information in real-time, as the situation demands.

What challenges do you envision are ahead?

As in all fields, successful PAs of the future will combine human qualities with technology integration. In the slightly more distant future, Executives will have a suite of both human, virtual and hologram assistants.

What are the uncertainties as well as the tools of hope?

Executives will always require deep trust relationships with those closest to them. Assistants are likely to become extensions of executives, rather than recorders and enactors of their instructions.

What scenarios do you envisage?

Voice-to-text, voice-to-image and even voice-to-video, in which an

An interview
with

Dr Morne Mostert



Dr Morne Mostert
Director

Institute for Futures Research
Stellenbosch University

interview with simple voice prompts from the Executive will produce animation instruction for the PA. This will mean a much richer spectrum of interactions between PA and Executive. In the more distant future, assistants will have real-time data on the mental and physical conditions of Executives and will organise meetings for critical decisions around optimal biochemical levels of the Executive.

IS A PA JOB DESCRIPTION worth the paper it is written on?

In the next five years you will certainly see a shift in the need for Assistants who can confidentially attend meetings in place of their Executive, who understand the business, react to the needs of their Executive and can handle complex issues and resolve difficult problems.

Job descriptions are focused on the job, not the individual performing the role! This is true across all industries, however, for Assistants, it is doing us a disservice, particularly as the role will evolve to include so much more than a list of obvious tasks and responsibilities.

The job description is often passed down from Assistant to Assistant, it isn't refreshed or updated and it is never seen again once you are placed in the role. So, yes, we talk about the job descriptions for PAs a lot, but I've got to ask the question – is a PA job description worth the paper it is written on. I think not!

And here is why:

A job description doesn't really reflect what an Assistant does on a day to day basis.

I don't think I know any PA who has whipped out their job description when encountering an issue with their Executive or their organisation to justify their complaint. It doesn't protect us because our role is so wide that a piece of paper can't really do it justice.

What should replace the job description?

I know that the ideal would be something completely different to the traditional job description, but without changing the world, here are some things you can implement that will help bring what you do into sharper focus.

- Tasks – Literally, everything you do.

Keep a list of everything you do. All of the high level stuff, all of the amazing projects you work on, all of the drama that you resolve and the problems you make go away – everything.

I confess that I strongly dislike the phrase 'ad hoc duties' because it suggests that all the little things we do, all those fires we are putting out are somehow irrelevant. They are not. That is the stuff that keeps the organisation going and we are responsible for it. So write, it all down!

- Personal Brand

What are the competencies you bring to the role, as an individual. Start with the competencies in the job description you have (being organised, being a team player, being flexible, being an effective communicator) and flesh them out.

Go deeper... What makes you amazing in your role?

- What makes you stand out?
- What are the qualities that you as an individual are bringing to your organisation that make you ace your job every day?

If you haven't thought about your personal brand before, I can understand why, you are too busy. But it is so important to know your strengths and actually your weaknesses too. Take the time to do this because there is another huge reason and that is the onset of technology that will take over a lot of the traditional Assistant tasks.

Detailing and understanding how you do business rather just what you do will greatly benefit you now and in years to come.

- Expectations

Wouldn't it be awesome to walk into a new role and know exactly what is expected of you and actually what you expect in return! You would be able to go about your day knowing that you are doing everything that is required of you and planning how you can exceed those expectations all the while being treated with respect and getting the reward and recognition that is owed to you.

Instead of a job description, it would be incredible if you and your Executive sat down and wrote a detailed list of expectations that will make your relationship work and to make you successful in your role.

- Communication and Feedback

You have got to communicate what you do, how you feel, your expectations and your boundaries with those in your organisation that need to know.

You need to ask for feedback, get an understanding of what you are doing well and what can be improved.

You need to have goals, objectives and plans in place that keep you motivated, challenged and happy.

PA job descriptions really aren't worth the paper they will be written on in the future... Let's get ready for our value-add in terms of reality.

About the author

Nicky Christmas is the founder of Practically Perfect PA, a website dedicated to the support and development of assistants throughout the world.

Prior to this, Nicky spent 15 years working her way up from a Junior Administrator through to an Executive Assistant and Marketing Manager at a global events company. Nicky plays an active part in the Assistant community and has written many articles for high level industry publications, presented at events, webinars and trade shows.

Contact: nicky@practicallyperfectpa.com; <http://www.practicallyperfectpa.com/>

“ If you haven't thought about your personal brand before, I can understand why, you are too busy.”

No matter when you started working, you've seen progress in our profession. The job I had in 1984 doesn't exist anymore. The word secretary evolved into administrative assistant and then to administrative professional.

We don't really assist much anymore, do we?



Exciting changes in store for the Administrative Profession

The first full-time job I applied to after college was as a receptionist at a real estate company. I wore my mother's linen suit, silk blouse, and pearls to the interview. I was offered the job during the interview and I gladly accepted it.

I was instructed that, although everyone in the office called my boss Tod, I was to call him Mr. Donnelly. My hours were 8 to 5 (an hour longer than anyone else worked). I was complimented on my outfit (which was my mother's nicest work outfit, too) and told that it was appropriate for me to dress like that every day and that pants were frowned upon. Each day Mr. Donnelly wrote out a list of things he wanted me to do that day (on top of all the regular duties I was responsible for). Whenever he wasn't in the office at 5 p.m., he called to see that (a) I was there and (b) there was nothing urgent that needed to be taken care of.

I was paid \$13,000 a year (which would pretty much all be spent on clothes, if I was expected to dress like that

each day) and, excited to finally have my own money, I rented an apartment and bought a second-hand car.

It was 1984.

Have times changed! Over the years, I progressed from those annoying Selectric typewriters to a Memorywriter, to an original Macintosh 128K computer and then to a PC. I never used carbon paper (thank goodness), but I certainly loaded my share of fax machines with that heat sensitive paper that was such a pain to work with. I remember using pagers, those pink 'While You Were Out' messages, and the first cell phones, which were not mobile.

I think the word assistant is going in the direction of the word secretary. Yes, there are some jobs in which we really do assist, in the same way that some jobs really are secretarial—but they're in the minority.

The majority of us are administrative experts. We know how to get things done. We are no longer waiting for the

Mr. Donnellys of the world to give us a task to complete. We have a full-time job to do without anyone dropping off extra work on the corner of our desk.

We make sure the office is running smoothly, that everyone has what they need, that everyone is where they are supposed to be, and that the administrative side of the business is operating seamlessly.

While we may not manage people, per se (although many of us certainly do), we do manage processes and procedures. If something isn't done properly, we are typically the ones to fix it before anyone notices.

So, what does our future look like?

In my 25+ years as a speaker, trainer, author, and consultant, I've seen a tremendous progression in the role of admin. I need to be slightly ahead of the curve, in order to teach and speak about what is coming. Perhaps I'm a fortune teller for those of us in the administrative world, and perhaps I've just been lucky.

I started teaching minute taking before most people realized they needed to take minutes. Taking minutes died in the early 1980s, but it was brought back to life again after scandals at companies like BreX, Arthur Anderson, and Enron.

I started teaching Project Management for Admins about five years ago, when no one realized what was around the bend. Today, admins are all doing some sort of project management, regardless of what it is called at their organization.

Recently, I started to teach a lot of admins to go From Admin to VA because the virtual world is right around the corner.

By the year 2025, about half the workforce will be virtual. Will you be able to work virtually? Hot desking is already taking force at some of the world's largest companies including Microsoft, Ernst & Young, and Google.

In the future, not only will we work virtually, we will not even have to be employees of companies. You will be your own business (or jump from contract to contract), offering administrative support through some sort of business solution (and not necessarily assistance) to those companies that need you for a pre-determined

number of hours per month or on a contract (project) basis.

By 2020 (just slightly more than three years away), 50 per cent of the workforce will be composed of members of the Millennial generation. In comparison, Generation X (1946-1965) accounts for only 16 per cent of the workforce now.

What does that mean for today's administrative professionals?

It means we won't need to assist these Millennials with anything. They will do it all themselves. Millennials (regardless of what mainstream media says) are perfectly capable, and they are not expecting you to do everything for them. They know how to write their own emails, are glued to their cell phones so they don't need you to monitor their email for them, and with the touch of an app they can book their own travel, too. They are self-sufficient and wouldn't know what to do with an assistant, in most cases.

They don't need assistance or assistants. They need fully autonomous, fully functional adults who don't need to be told what to do.

The future of the administrative assistant becomes more of a solutions management role. You make things run smoothly through your processes and procedures. You know what needs to be done and ensure that it gets done.

Your future looks incredibly bright to me. I see much more respect, recognition, and challenge in the future for us. I see us being in control of what we want our careers to look like and potentially the paycheques that go with it. I see opportunity, growth, and excitement.

There is a great future ahead for admins. Are you going with me?

Good luck.

Rhonda

Rhonda Scharf is a well-recognized Professional Speaker, Trainer, Consultant and Author based both in Ottawa Canada and Fort Myers, Florida.

Contact: Rhonda@on-the-right-track.com; <http://www.on-the-right-track.com>

Introduction to the Worldwide Survey conducted by PAFSA in 2016/2017

As per the Publishers Note in this publication, PAFSA with a group of six PAs devised a survey and sent it worldwide to obtain a global reading of the most and least prominent tasks and responsibilities of the PA/EA.

The reading follows on these pages. Before we published these, we again invited PAs worldwide to look at the results and make comments.

It will be interesting for you to read and make observations, as the findings may resonate with you and your situation or not - the world of the PA can also be determined by the organisation's size, the industry, or the immediate boss' attitude and aptitude regarding the latest technology and gadgets.

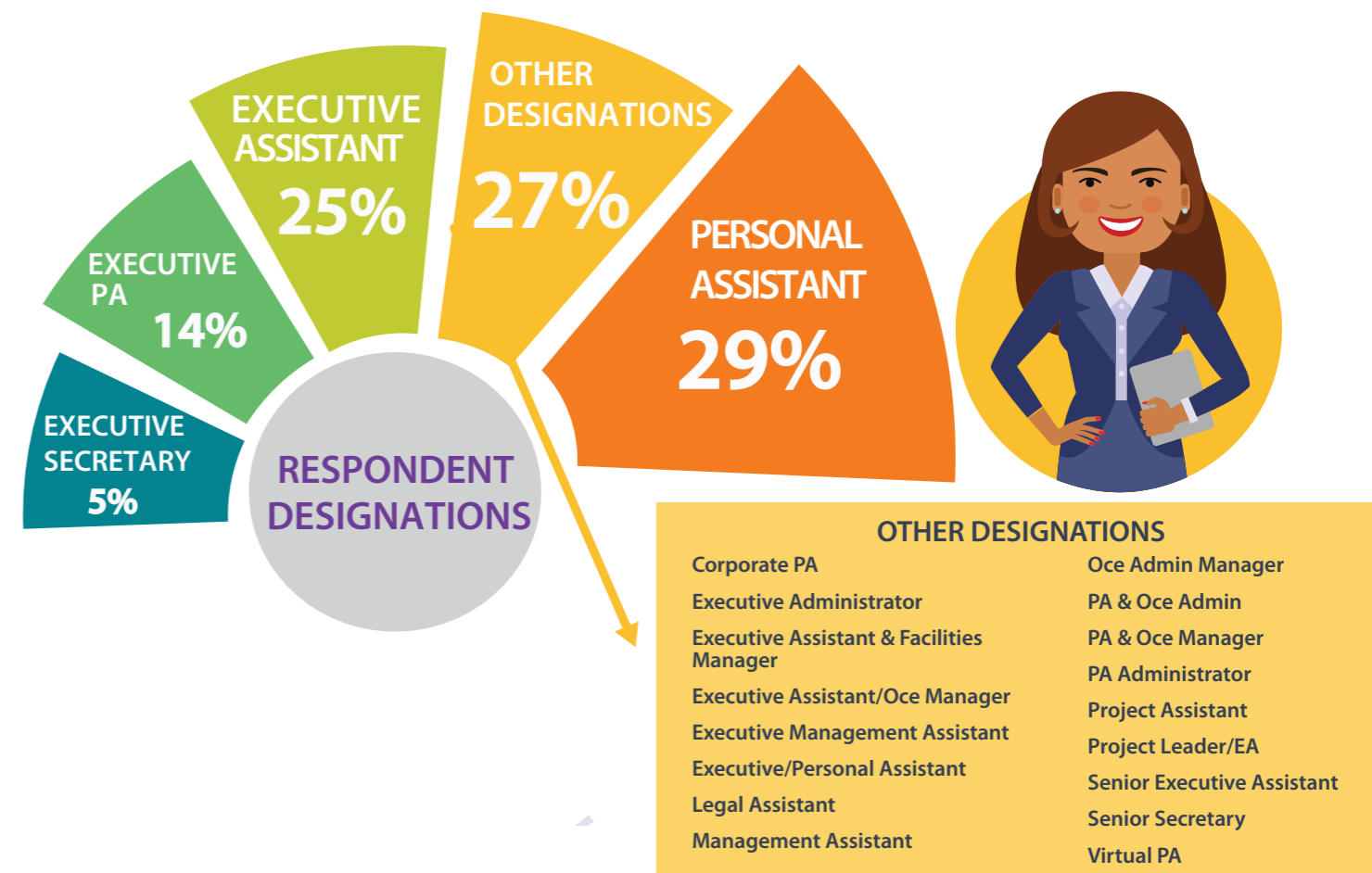
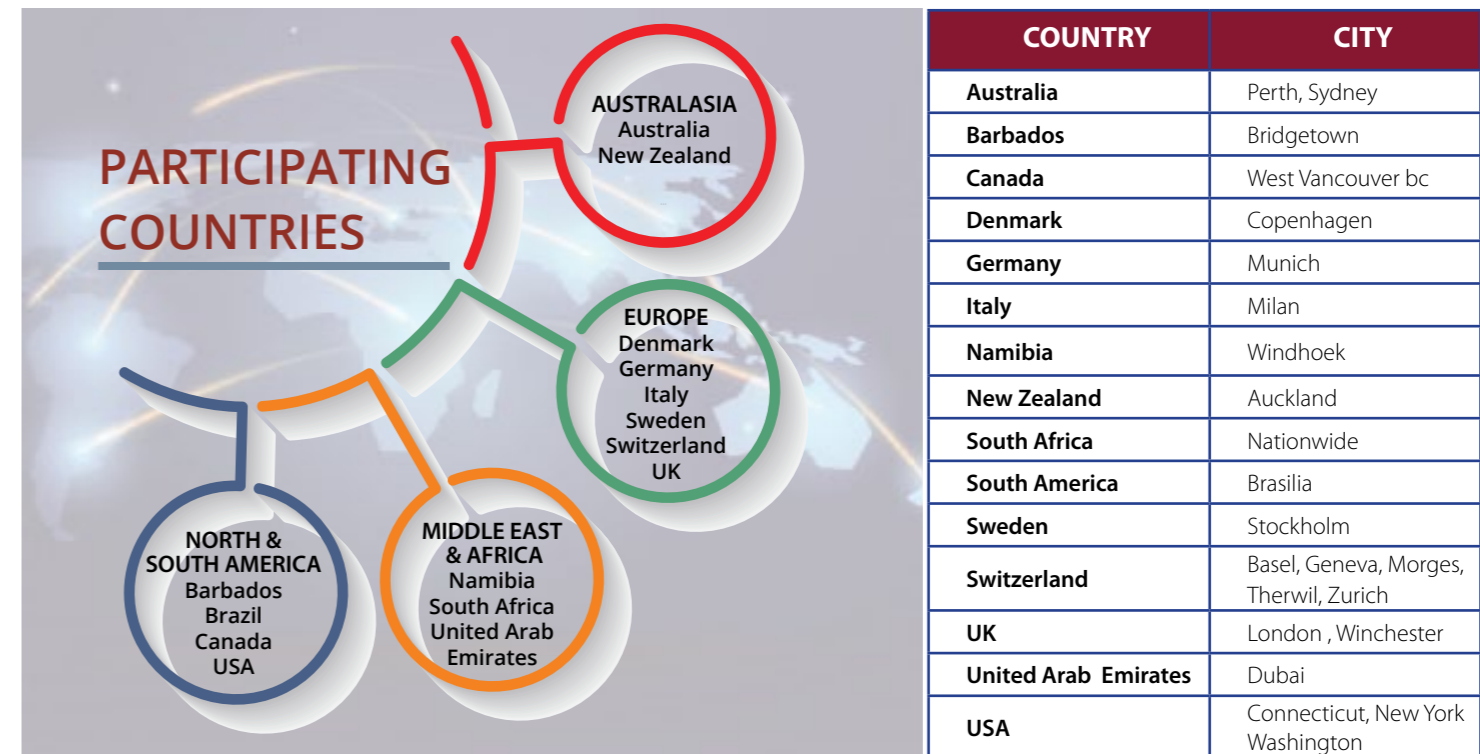
PAFSA takes the opportunity to record its appreciation to all PAs/EAs worldwide for having given of their time to answers the various survey sections that enable us to produce this reading.

The team of South African PAs who headed the survey project:

- Carine Daniels
- Alice van der Westhuizen
- Tebogo Ngobese
- Mastoora Ramiah
- Tanya de Ponte
- Tersia Pretorius

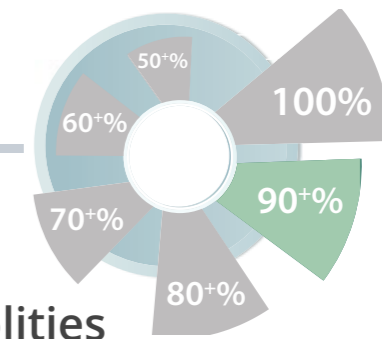
As this Blueprint reveals, the PA/EA role will evolve dramatically with the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and this is equal to when the secretarial role dramatically evolved the day secretaries stopped typing onto paper and started seeing their typing on a screen - first the Word Processor, and then who could imagine how the concept 'screen' came to evolve. Not surprisingly, many countries and many organisations started letting go of the designation 'secretary' and new designations emerged.

Today, we are on the cusp of the next great move forward and obviously we all await with great anticipation the roll-out of new tools that will make working life significantly different - and so the next couple of years will produce interesting readings of tasks and responsibilities



Summary of most applicable work categories

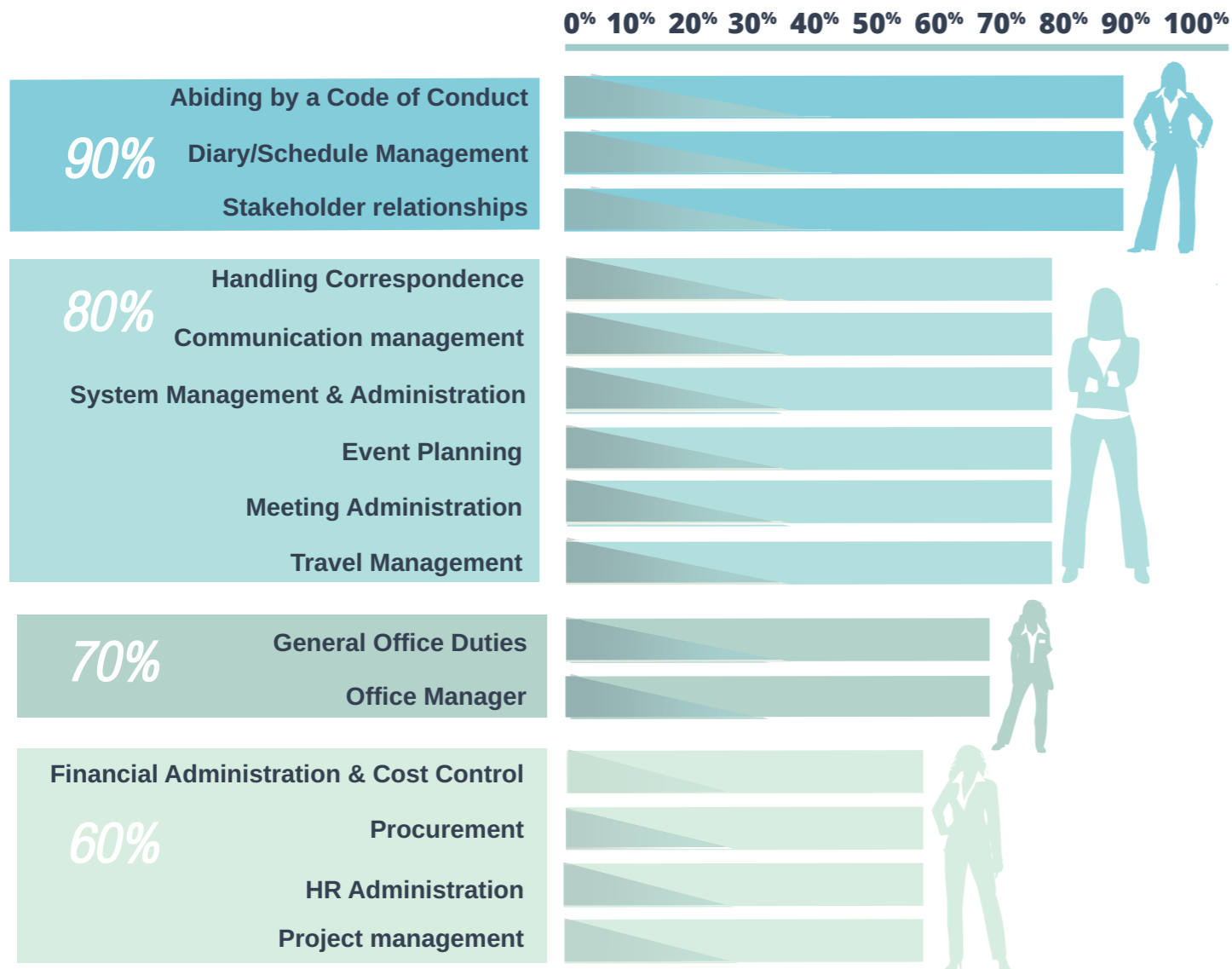
Tasks common to 90% of participants



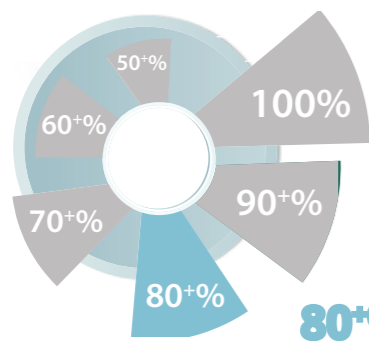
90% said yes to 23 tasks/responsibilities

WORK CATEGORIES

There were 15 Work Categories surveyed. When averaging out the responses the % hierarchy below shows the 2016/2017 picture of the PA/EA role and responsibilities.



Tasks/Responsibilities	WORK CATEGORIES
Adhering to professional business standards in relation to services rendered by using correct resources	Code of Conduct
Ensuring sound business excellence	
Contributing to the team and effort to collaborate	
Managing the executive's office and interacting with other executives and people on other levels	Communication Management
Composing and type responses to office correspondence	
Engaging with Management and employees through Internal and External communication tools.	
Handling of incoming office communication via e-mail/fax/post	Correspondence
Accurate typing	
Composing and typing responses to office correspondence and handling enquires for the Managing Executive's approval and signature	
Receiving, processing and dispatching all other correspondence	Diary & Schedule Management
General diary management with effective planning, organising and coordinating schedules	
Managing and coordinating demanding schedule of the executive/s	
Sourcing and organising venues for conferences and team building activities	Event Planning
Meeting room reservation management	
Screening and directing incoming calls	General Office Duties
Ordering of flowers and gifts for staff, suppliers and clients	
Meeting organisation and supporting internal & external stakeholders plus executive groups	Meeting Administration
Scheduling of departmental routine meetings	
Maintaining a close working relationship with other departments	Stakeholder Relationships
Rendering of quality and professional service to internal and external stakeholders.	
Liaising with clients suppliers, service providers and VIP guests	
Creating and maintaining filing systems and archiving systems	System Management and Administration
Coordinating/planning travel arrangements and business itineraries for national and international travel via a travel agent or internal online travel booking systems	Travel Management

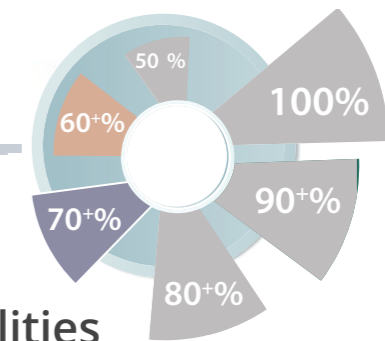


80% said yes to **18** tasks/responsibilities

Tasks common to 80% of participants

Tasks/Responsibilities	WORK CATEGORIES
Providing professional lines of communication and correspondence with internal and external stakeholders	Communication Management
Correspondence management, drafting and distribution e.g. minutes agenda and letters and memorandums	Correspondence
Preparing required reports and presentations utilising required software programmes	Correspondence
Assisting with Management Team's diaries and scheduling of appointments	Diary & Schedule Management
Planning, coordinating and managing the process for conferences, seminars, workshops and manage strategic workshops	Event Planning
Assessing venue for meetings to ensure these are hospitable, user-friendly and disability accessible.	Event Planning
General office expense administration including preparation of expense claims, invoices for payment and reconciliation, submit travel and local expense claims for travellers	Financial Administration & Cost Control
Administering printing, photocopying and stationery requirements	General Office Duties
Providing secretarial support at various meetings and record meetings. Ensuring that all logistical requirements are in place, drafting agendas and minutes of meetings	Meeting Administration
Ensuring that the Directors are well prepared for meetings	Meeting Administration
Delegating the necessary instructions to departments in the Director's absence	Meeting Administration
Managing the office of the executive/s and interacting with other executives and people on other levels	Office Management
Managing safekeeping of confidential documentation & Service Level Agreements	Office Management
Supporting the Management Team and mentor all administrative assistants	Stakeholder relationships
Updating client lists and other contact lists	System Management and Administration
Planning and implementing office systems and processes	System Management and Administration
Preparing and managing a follow-up system on decisions taken at meetings	System Management and Administration
Assisting travellers with visa application	Travel Management

Tasks common to 60% and to 70% of participants



70% said yes to **10** tasks/responsibilities

Tasks/Responsibilities	WORK CATEGORIES
Producing accurate management reports and distribute accordingly	Correspondence
Creating, capturing and submitting Requisitions, Purchase Orders and Goods Receipts using financial software for office expenses	Financial Administration & Cost Control
Stationery ordering,/distribution and managing	General Office Duties
Ordering business cards	General Office Duties
Managing meetings schedules with Board of Directors / Non-Executive Directors	Meeting Administration
Preparing and performing quality control on agendas and minutes	Meeting Administration
Managing the office of the Head of Department and interacting with Divisional Head and people on other levels in absence of the manager	Office Management
Promoting good housekeeping on an on-going basis	Office Management
Updating lists and departmental structure	Office Management
Organising group bookings (travel/accommodation) for external training groups	Travel Management

60% said yes to **9** tasks/responsibilities

Outputs	WORK CATEGORIES
Messaging, writing, editing and publication; as well as design and production	Communication Management
Ensuring effective budget management and payment of service.	Financial Administration & Cost Control
Administering office equipment	General Office Duties
Being responsible for office maintenance and cleaning staff	General Office Duties
Organising birthday club collection, distribution and messaging	General Office Duties
Sourcing relevant vendors on the internet for required goods/services	Procurement
Planning, executing and Managing of medium projects	Project Management
Handling Forex arrangements	Travel Management
Preparing for on-boarding of new staff - equipment, seats, laptop and phones	Work related to HR



A Blueprint from South Africa to the world!

A PAFSA Publication

www.pafsa.co.za

published by

Lazuli Communications (Pty) Ltd

Telephone: +27 11 616 7401

admin@lazulicommunications.co.za

www.lazulicommunications.co.za