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# Enhancing staff development through search committee participation

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*New skills and knowledge of participatory management  
are gained in the process.*

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Since the 1960s we have witnessed a continuing interest in the study of organizations, relationships within them, and individual competence in relation to organizational effectiveness. Issues such as interpersonal communication and group decision-making have been explored in depth, resulting in greater experimentation on the part of managers. Educational institutions, profiting from industry-based research, have become more active advocates of participatory management. Administrators have accepted the premise that organizations reflect the effectiveness of their employees and, as a result, personnel and staff development programs have found greater support. Academic libraries have been strongly influenced by these developments, as indicated by increasing response to such offerings as the programs of the Office of Management Studies of the Association of Research Libraries and the ACRL continuing education programs.

A common example of participatory management in academic libraries is the use of search or selection committees in the hiring of professional staff. While the primary objective of the search committee is the hiring of new librarians, a valu-

able by-product is the development of skills and the acquisition of knowledge by staff members, leading to greater organizational effectiveness. With greater awareness of the potential for such staff development through participation in search committees, administrators, supervisors and staff can capitalize on this potential, and plan for effective utilization of new skills and knowledge in everyday library operations.

## Skills and abilities

Search committee members gain a variety of skills and abilities ranging from interviewing techniques to candidate evaluation and selection, from basic communication skills to consensus decision-making.

*Interviewing techniques.* While group interviews may differ from individual interviews, many techniques learned in one are applicable to the other. Less experienced staff members have the opportunity to learn from others how to phrase questions to elicit meaningful responses. Even experienced staff members gain from learning what others have found to be successful questioning tech-

niques, the proper pacing of an interview, what questions might be illegal, and the like.

**Communication skills.** The success of the search process depends heavily on the ability to communicate well. Developing an effective and attractive job announcement requires the ability to write clearly and concisely, presenting information so that the reader can understand the position and the requirements. Obtaining references requires a number of communication skills: writing, formulating questions, listening, and sometimes probing. Search committee members have an opportunity, both in the reference process and in the interview, to improve their ability to listen carefully to responses and to focus additional questions based on those responses. In a group interview, this takes on additional significance as committee members proceed synergistically to explore themes in greater depth or to expand into new but related areas.

A successful interview can determine the appropriateness of a candidate for a position, and offer the committee members an opportunity to improve their public relations skills in presenting a positive image of the position, the library and the university.

**Group skills.** For many academic librarians, the search committee process will be the first of many occasions permitting participation in group decision making. Search committees, like task forces, are essentially *pro tem* groups for accomplishing a specific assignment. They bring together staff members who do not ordinarily work together but who must learn how to function well as a group. Group members may have to play different roles to carry out the group's assignment; for example, coordinator, dominator, and harmonizer. With awareness of these roles and their impact on the group process, members will be better able to monitor the group's progress and increase its effectiveness. The increased use of groups by academic libraries for decision-making necessitates the development of such skills.

The search committee may serve as a forum for learning other useful group techniques. There will at times be conflicting views on the relative strengths and weaknesses of candidates. Achieving consensus will depend upon each member's ability to recognize the validity of other opinions as well as to articulate one's own views. Less frequently, major conflicts may arise requiring the chair to intervene and resolve the issue without straining relationships.

**Leadership skills.** Leadership implies the ability to motivate others to accomplish the task at hand. The chair carries the major leadership responsibility for the group. The chair must be an effective team builder, delegator, and coordinator. Since the duration of the group is short, the chair must be able to establish his or her authority rapidly and create an atmosphere conducive to mutual trust and rapport allowing open discussions of candi-

dates' strengths and weaknesses. As delegator, the chair allots the work of the group equitably and monitors progress. As coordinator, the chair, like the producer of a movie, ensures that all of the pieces come together in an organized and efficient manner. Interview schedules frequently include library administrators, faculty, and staff in both formal and informal settings.

There may be opportunities for other committee members to develop leadership skills in the process. It is important that all parties meeting with candidates be well prepared. The chair may delegate to other committee members the responsibility to meet with groups and individuals beforehand to explain their roles and help them formulate questions. After the interviews, these same liaisons can gather feedback, synthesize it, and present it to the search committee. In this way, members of the committee may test leadership techniques in a relatively controlled setting.

## Knowledge

Skills and abilities learned in the search process can frequently be transferred directly to the day-to-day responsibilities of staff members. More subtle is the value of the knowledge about the organization gained through search committee participation.

**The position.** Search committee members need to have information about the position under recruitment and its department. In order to describe the position and its requirements, members must understand the history of the position and the nature of the responsibilities. Staff members from within the department can educate others on these topics as well as on how the position fits into the department and relates to other positions. Documentation such as annual reports, task force reports, and other studies can provide valuable orientation. Readings from current library literature may provide a broader context in which the committee can operate.

**Organization.** Organization charts provide a graphic display of an organization's structure, and the library's annual report describes organizational achievements and goals. A more meaningful understanding may be gained through participation in the search process as a result of exposure to staff from other areas of the library and discussions with library administrators. Frequently staff members can gain insights into major problems or issues facing the library.

**Values and philosophy.** Search committees provide an excellent channel through which library administrators can convey the organization's values and philosophy. Discussions centered around mission statements and objectives are effective means of raising consciousness and providing a framework in which organizational change is possible. Either as a member of a search committee or

in charging the committee, an administrator seeking greater innovation, creativity, risk-taking or trust can discuss the importance of these values and the need to communicate them in the search process.

**Additional learnings.** There are numerous other learnings possible for committee members. Exposure to other staff members and candidates increases awareness of a variety of management and personal styles. Discussions with personnel officers can increase knowledge about personnel policy and procedures. Campus-wide issues, relations with the faculty, and other community issues may arise during the course of the interview requiring committee members to be well informed.

### Summary

Search committees have become a standard means of involving staff in the recruitment and hiring of academic librarians. This involvement has the potential for considerable enrichment of staff. Committee members have the opportunity to learn or improve interviewing techniques, to communicate more effectively, to gain a better understanding of group process, and to sharpen leadership skills. Increased knowledge about the organization's values and philosophy, structure and goals is a product of this participatory process.

Ideally, staff development activities provide individual learning and result in organizational im-

provement. Many of the skills that individual staff members acquire through participation in searches, and much of the knowledge, can be utilized in the execution of their normal responsibilities and can be transferred as well to future projects and committee assignments. Managers have the opportunity to see staff in a variety of settings and can, therefore, make better assessments about their staff development needs and strengths. Finally, with a better understanding of the organization and an awareness of the ideas and perspectives of others, individual staff members can contribute to an evolving organizational culture and identity.

Either accidentally or deliberately, some staff development will occur as a result of the search committee process. Administrators can capitalize on the potential for staff development and plan for its effective utilization. During the orientation of committee members, administrators can point out the variety of opportunities that will arise and encourage members to take full advantage of them. At the conclusion of the search it would be useful for the committee to review what the members have learned and how new skills and knowledge might be applied.

At no additional cost, a wise administrator can derive substantial benefits from the search process. By investing a bit more, the same administrator can increase even more the value of the search process to the staff development program. ■■

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## Letters

### Audio Tape Transfer

To the Editor:

I read with great interest Martin Levitt's article "A Case Study in Audio Tape Transfer" in the November issue. The American Philosophical Society (APS) should be applauded for taking the initiative to address the deterioration of tape recordings in its collection. Too few libraries and sound archives are as ambitious as the APS in following through on their initial preservation impulses. Unfortunately, enthusiastic response to initial impulses, if not well thought through, can lead to inappropriate preservation action.

The methodology used in the initial stages of the APS transfer project is appropriate and follows the approach taken by most libraries and archives preparing to do a preservation study. Once preservation needs were assessed, however, several important decisions were made based on inconclusive or inappropriate information. As a preservation specialist, with a working knowledge of both print and non-print preservation procedures, I would

like to raise the following points regarding this project.

1) Why, despite your apparent understanding of accepted (albeit "conventional") reformatting procedures did you choose the "more radical" and untested RDAT format? Not only is RDAT relatively unavailable in this country (enough of a reason *not* to select it for long-term preservation) but its effectiveness as a preservation medium has not to my knowledge been independently assessed. Independent testing helps one avoid being sold a bill of goods by persuasive hardware/software representatives. Even though there is a strong temptation to embrace the latest and most up-to-date technology for use in our libraries and archives, we must remember that one of the primary axioms of conservation and preservation is the concept of reversibility: Do nothing that cannot be undone. In audio preservation this means do as little as possible to the original signal, and preserve it using available, proven technology.

2) In planning the project there appears to have been little or no effort made to consult with other

sound archives or professional organizations. If the APS had contracted the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC), or one of the major U.S. sound archives (Library of Congress, Stanford Archive of Recorded Sound, Yale, New York Public Library, and others) prior to implementing the IBM audio engineers' recommendations, they would likely have been told about the associated Audio Archives (AAA) Preservation Committee.

The Committee has for the last several years been preparing a document, with NEH support, that examines in detail the preservation of sound recordings. The final version of the report was published last April and many of the recommendations were in draft form well before that date. (Association for Recorded Sound Collections, Associated Audio Archives Committee, *Audio Preservation: A Planning Study*. Silver Spring, Maryland: Association for Recorded Sound Collections, 1987. Copies may be ordered from Elwood McKee, 118 Monroe Street #610, Rockville, MD 20850.) The study, which makes recommendations for the long-term archival preservation of sound recordings, *does not endorse any of the current digital formats for preservation purposes*. Their reasons are: a) ". . . because there are no nationally accepted standards for the various digital recorders and formats, b) because the audio industry has yet to resolve its conflicting systems, and c) because neither equipment nor formats have yet been tested or proven reliable in an archival setting for making archival preservation transfer copies of sound recordings" (from the AAA study). At the rapid rate with which new recording systems and associated hardware are introduced into the consumer market, there is no guarantee that the latest digital recording system will be around in 10 (much less 100) years.

3) Digital transfer of analog materials also raises a philosophical issue. When a continuous analog signal is sampled and digitized, it is assigned a string of binary values which correspond to the analog signal's frequency and amplitude. This process, called encoding, is similar to taking a "snapshot" of the analog signal many times each second. These binary codes are stored on magnetic tape (or disk, as with CDs) and then decoded for playback. Current industry-established sampling rates for digital recording are designed to encompass most (but not all) sounds within the human hearing range. While digital recording processes are constantly being improved there is serious concern by audio specialists and engineers that the current sampling rates are simply too low to adequately capture the sonic information from a well recorded analog source. While analog-to-analog transfer may introduce noise (tape-hiss) into subsequent copies, analog-to-digital conversion actually removes sonic information permanently from the original analog source during digitization.

4) Generally, one should not rely solely on *Consumer Reports* for product endorsement or techni-

cal assessment. Rather, one should seek advice from independent technicians and sound engineers who are not affiliated with for-profit operations. Occasionally, manufacturers do work with preservation specialists and conservators to develop specialized products. However, the preservation of valuable material should never be the test "guinea pig" for new hardware or software products. Unfortunately too few manufacturers in the commercial audio and video field understand the archival mission as one of access and preservation beyond the foreseeable future.

In an effort to provide working guidelines for the preparation, microfilming, chemical processing, quality control, and storage of archival records for preservation purposes, librarians and archivists working with industry specialists have developed standards which address each step of the microfilming process. These standards have helped foster a better working relationship between librarians, preservation specialists, and microfilming agencies by making clear exactly what is meant by preservation microfilming. Through vigorous campaigning by ALA/RTSD and others the word is getting out that there is in fact a "right and wrong" way to plan and carry out a preservation microfilming project. Similar efforts are under way in the sound archives community but much still needs to be done. The AAA report is an important and useful contribution that brings together current preservation knowledge and expertise. Those charged with responsibility for collections of sound recordings should read the report and get involved. It is only through increased communication between collection curators, sound archivists, and librarians that standards and procedures to preserve our recorded sound heritage will be developed and practiced. — *Mark S. Roosa, Andrew W. Mellon Preservation Administration, Intern, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

#### *The author responds:*

The APS adopted RDAT for several reasons, not the least of which was the recommendation of IBM technical specialists. IBM was utilized on a consultant basis and had no vested interest in "selling" any format over any other. Thus, advice on RDAT was indeed sought from "independent technicians and sound engineers." *Consumer Reports* merely confirmed their assessment.

The sampling rate of DAT—16 bits per sample—was certified by IBM speech recognition specialists as well above the acceptable limit of 12 bits. As for the comparison of analog-to-analog versus analog-to-digital transfer, the assertion that sonic information is lost in the latter process is rather misleading: According to Professor Ken J. Pohlmann, Director of the Music Engineering Program at the University of Miami, the information lost is above 20kHz, that is, above the range of human hearing, and extraneous, unintended sound

below the noise floor of the analog master. In other words, the chances of losing any part of the intended information-bearing signal during digital-to-analog transfer is extremely remote. On the other hand, during the analog-to-analog transfer process, sonic information is added to the original signal in the form of tape hiss, obscuring potentially information-bearing frequencies. Professor Pohlmann also points out in his book *Principles of Digital Audio* (Indianapolis: Howard W. Sams & Co., 1985, p. 179) that "with analog storage, there is no opportunity for error protection processing: if the recorded signal is disrupted or distorted, then the signal is irrevocably damaged. With digital storage, the nature of binary data lends itself to recovery in the event of damage."

To those who might find these technicalities arcane, consider this example: Imagine making fifty duplicate generations of a source tape—tape one the master for tape two, two for three, and so on—by an analog process. The last tape would of course sound terrible compared to the original tape. Using RDAT, the last tape would be absolutely indistinguishable from the first. The ability of DAT to be cloned adds a measure of security to the APS project. Should it become necessary at some point in the future to duplicate the collection again, no signal will be lost at all.

Of course other sound archives were consulted in the initial stages of this project, including the Library of Congress. In fact, much thought was given to having LC's specialists do the entire job, but this course was reluctantly abandoned for the reasons given in the article. A tour of LC's audio conservation area was particularly informative and helped to identify some of the equipment that would be required to undertake the project.

That RDAT is an unconventional approach to audio conservation is undeniable. In this respect, it is not surprising that this part of the APS project is inconsistent with the recommendations of ARSC (of which we are well aware). However, we are satisfied that the process is reversible, and that the risks have been minimized. We do not agree that because a preservation technique is new and therefore unconventional, it is inappropriate. Much thought and research about the options available convinced us that the risks in adopting RDAT were worth taking.

The APS project was conceived as a medium-range solution that will keep our options open for the future. Most importantly, systematic and positive action has been taken that will facilitate access and stem the decay of the Library's audio collections.—Martin L. Levitt, *American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia, PA.* ■■

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## ACRL executive summary

### *Professional development*

The final reporting for the NEH Humanities Workshop Project was prepared and submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities. The new project, for historically black colleges and universities, moved along with applications from participants coming in at month's end.

### *Enhancing library service capability*

The ACRL office continued to provide advisory services and free distribution of standards.

### *Advocacy and liaison*

Bill Moffett will develop this theme for his presidential year.

A fourth draft of the *Accreditation Manual*, by Pat Sacks and Sara Lou Whildin, has been sent to ALA Publishing.

### *Research and publication*

A special design will mark the issues in the Fiftieth Anniversary year of *College & Research Libraries*, beginning in January. Look for the gold covers, discreetly marked "1939-1989."

Arthuree Wright agreed to chair the Research Committee and is eager to settle on a clearer mission for the Committee by the 1989 Annual Conference in Dallas. At Midwinter, the Committee discussed the work of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Library Programs in the area of research, Charles Martell's "Research Perspective" editorial in *C&RL*, and possible new directions for themselves.

JoAn Segal visited the *Choice* offices, which have been recently automated. *Choice* will host an awards ceremony in honor of the publication of *Books for College Libraries*, 3d ed., and the automation of their magazine's production. The first tape version of *Books for College Libraries* has been sold.

### *Strategic management directions*

The major activity of the month was preparing the 1990 Operating Plan and Budget. Staff also brainstormed on work reorganization, hoping to improve both the quality of service and worklife at ACRL.—JoAn S. Segal. ■■