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The Personnel Office and

the Personnel Officer

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ANSWERS TO A question sheet sent early in 1954 to fifty libraries indicate that the trend toward recognition of personnel administration in the organizational structure, which began some time ago, is continuing. The inquiry was sent to the larger public libraries, chiefly those having more than ten branches, and to the largest university libraries. Seventy per cent of those solicited for information returned the question sheet. Of these, 57 per cent reported that their personnel administration duties are now assigned to a special officer. Undoubtedly, this is an increase over what might have been discovered ten, or even five, years ago.

Because recognition of personnel administration as a separate function is relatively recent, library literature on the subject is not yet extensive nor profound, as the evaluated bibliography published last year shows.[1] Many librarians now realize that their traditional feeling of being different from workers in other fields has been an erroneous one. This realization has led librarians to a study of the personnel literature from other vocations where more has been done to develop personnel methods than in libraries. Such study has led them to a fuller recognition of personnel administration as a separate area of administrative endeavor, an area which requires special techniques of the persons performing it, and, in the larger libraries, special offices and officers to perform it.[2]

Difficulties as well as help have come from study of the personnel literature of business and industry. Librarians were too inexperienced in personnel administration practices to assimilate their reading at first. Also, the unfamiliarity of the situations described and of the terminology seems to have annoyed them. Bringing into libraries personnel workers from business and industry, as has been done in a few places, may have aggravated the annoyance instead of furthering

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understanding of universal precepts, as might have been expected. This situation cannot be very widespread, however, since only 20 per cent of the libraries which assign personnel work to a special officer said that personnel training alone was specified for the position. Ten per cent accept either library school or personnel preparation; 30 per cent ask for personnel training added to library school; and 35 per cent require library school alone. The remaining 5 per cent have no training specification at present.

From their writings and discussions, the chief difficulty librarians have experienced from studying business and industrial personnel methods seems to stem from preoccupation with techniques. This may be due to the fact that techniques for their own sake are of great importance in some areas of librarianship. The error of emphasis in this area lies in the fact that personnel administration is concerned with people instead of inanimate materials. All personnel literature states this repeatedly. Even in those phases of librarianship where techniques are of the greatest importance, a philosophy underlying the tasks to be performed is recognized as essential to the proper accomplishment of them. A philosophy of action could be said to be even more important where people, instead of materials, are involved. Regulations, procedures, records, and all the other technical elements are necessary to the performance of personnel duties, but, authorities say, techniques should be kept to a useable minimum, be transcended by a spirit of good will and trust, and sublimate forms to manners. There would seem to be a need, then, for a philosophy of library personnel administration in order to give meaning to the essential actions.

A synthesis of definitions of personnel administration, around which a philosophy might be formulated and on which its accomplishment is based, can be made from a wide variety of writings. It is concerned with but two components: personnel, which means people, and administration, which means responsibility for accomplishment. Combined, the two components indicate achievement of the purposes of the library through its human resources rather than through its operational, mechanical, or financial elements. The two together also determine the objectives of personnel administration, of which there are two, both equally important: (1) to secure, retain, utilize, and develop an adequate staff by which to carry on efficiently the operations of the library; and (2) to fulfill the aspirations and capabilities of the individuals who compose the staff.[3]

The advantages of systematizing personnel administration as a

separate function, which libraries are recognizing, are inherent in its objectives. There are organizational and economic advantages which apply to the first objective and psychological and social advantages which help to attain the second, if personnel writers are correct. Successful accomplishment in personnel administration, being dependent upon the exercise of heart as well as head, naturally is more indefinable and less susceptible to measurement and control than are those areas of administration which depend upon operational, mechanical, or financial factors. The economic advantages of centralizing personnel matters in large libraries has precedent, however, from other fields of work where the profit motive rules out inefficiency. These can be no less desirable in nonprofit organizations where budgets are fixed and limited and where the motives of both officers and staff are identical.

The psychological advantages of systematized personnel administration are harder to recognize, although much has been written about the emotional needs of people at work.[4] In public service institutions the needs of patrons cannot wait, whereas, it is supposed, those of staff members can. Theoretically, this is true, even though it has become an administrative truism that successful management of any kind of an organization depends largely upon high morale among its personnel. The social advantages are interwoven with the psychological. Experiments and surveys made in all kinds and sizes of organizations have shown that a group of people working together constitutes a social situation in which working conditions and salaries, while very vital, are not as important in end results of good morale as satisfying human relations provisions.[5]

The specialized responsibilities of personnel administration are, in general, the same in all fields of work. They are listed in many writings, one of the most complete lists being found in *Personnel* for May 1947.[6] A summary of the tasks to be performed might divide them into two areas: technical and coordinative. All respondents to the 1954 inquiry, mentioned earlier, having separate personnel offices indicated that a full range of personnel duties was assigned to these offices. None, for example, limited it to employment functions alone.

The technical functions accomplish the first objective of personnel administration. These are employment, maintenance, training and communication, research, and services. Employment is the securing and assigning of a staff qualified to carry out the operations of a library. Maintenance is the utilizing, regulating, and sustaining of a willing and efficient staff. Training and communication efforts result

in developing, inspiring, and informing the staff so that its individuals may remain willing and efficient. Research is the studying of facts about the staff and matters which affect its support and government. Services promote the personal welfare of the staff so that its energies may be conserved for the work of the library.

The coordinative functions of personnel administration are less tangible than the technical tasks and are, therefore, the ones which are likely to be ignored in the pressure of coping with problems in the technical area. Although they aim fundamentally to accomplish the second objective of personnel administration, they cannot be separated entirely from the technical tasks in actual performance. This is particularly true of the maintenance and communication tasks. And it is by means of the coordinative duties that the psychological and social advantages of centralized personnel administration are made most apparent.

The highest form of coordinative duty is the personnel administrator's responsibility for helping to form policies and plans. This is carried on with the chief librarian in all libraries, and also with other officers in large libraries. Without the exact knowledge of current staff problems and opinions, which the personnel administrator can bring to the chief librarian's attention, policies and plans could prove sterile. Amy Winslow has expressed this clearly in a discussion of staff participation in library administration.[7] The personnel office can be the channel through which participation moves. Overseeing the inauguration, development, and evaluation of policies and plans so that they fulfill the staff's need for justice and consideration as individuals may be the personnel officer's most exacting but most exciting coordinative task. Coordinating policies and plans with changes in conditions also is a responsibility of a high order.

There are three kinds of administrative capacities described in personnel literature, an understanding of which helps to place personnel administration in its relationship to the whole administrative structure. *Line* administrators are those who have direct control over personnel, operations, and materials. They have the authority to say, "You do this. Do it at such a time, with these tools, in that place." Chief librarians, department heads, branch librarians, and other unit supervisors represent this kind. *Functional* administrators, represented by special-function directors such as supervisors of children's work, have authority to say, "Do it in this way." *Staff* administrators are those executives who properly do not have any direct authority in the sense of being able to say, "Do." Instead, they say, "Let

me help you do it," and give help by supplying information, reconciliation, correlation, and consultation.

According to personnel writers, personnel administration is a staff responsibility, since it acts primarily in a service capacity to everyone who works in an organization. The responsibility for designated accomplishments related to people is without any implication of order-giving, but with the strong implication of guidance. Line and functional administrators are charged with the translation of policies and plans into action. The personnel officer acts chiefly by informing, advising, and guiding line officers so that they may maintain skillful and harmonious interpersonal relations among staff members. Thus, a personnel office is distinguished from a mere collection of rooms, desks, files, and appliances in charge of an officer who makes rules independently, keeps records, and collects statistics. The majority of large libraries, 65 per cent of those having personnel offices, have organized them as staff functions. Twenty per cent assign line authority to their personnel officers, and 15 per cent indicated that both line authority and staff responsibility was assigned.

Personnel authorities urge that the personnel officer be given a status equal to that of line and functional executives under the chief administrator. The organizational level is not always apparent from the titles assigned to personnel officers by the libraries solicited for information. Those having special officers recognize the special function by including the word "personnel" in the titles, for the most part, but there is no great similarity otherwise. "Personnel Officer" appeared three times and "Supervisor of Personnel" twice. The same variance in titles occurs in business and industry, however, without denoting lack of high-ranking status. Rank may be indicated a little more clearly by the salary ranges quoted by the sample. The arithmetical median falls in the $5,000–$6,000 bracket, with the highest figure mentioned just under $8,000. University libraries evidently are not able at present to offer as high salaries for this special work as are public libraries.

The personnel program in a library, more than in many other kinds of organizations, is determined by the form of government under which it operates, as well as by the people who work for it.[8] There can be no exact prescription, therefore, for a program which will fit all sizes and kinds of libraries in all details, nor any magic formula for the selection of techniques, methods, records, or forms, and no required size for the personnel office, although the McDiarmids once mentioned one for public libraries.[9] The American Library Association

also suggested a specification in its manual of personnel organization and procedure.[10] If librarians agree with authorities from other fields, they will conclude that, when working out a personnel program, each library must study its own organization and staff without preconceived ideas of what can or cannot be done, except as it is limited by local governmental controls. It must analyze its own needs, plan an ideal program and likely ways to achieve it, revamp details where and when made necessary by changing conditions, select appropriate techniques and records on the basis of usefulness, draw upon the experiences of other libraries and other fields of work, and meanwhile try not to resort to more than a minimum of temporary expediencies.

Governmental determinants of library personnel policies and regulations are partly external and partly internal. External controls may include source of income, permissive legislation under which the library was established, other legislation such as a certification law, civil service jurisdictions, and the supervisory powers of state, county, or municipal bodies. Faculties, boards, commissions, councils, or departments may act for these bodies. Internal controls may include the library's legal contracts with federal, state, municipal, or other governmental divisions; its own board of directors, trustees, committees, or other directing groups; and its constitution or bylaws establishing the powers of its administrative and executive officers. The library's staff affects the details of a personnel program, also, at any given time. Both as members of organized groups, such as associations or unions, and as individuals, they influence the selection of methods as well as the formulation of policies. As members of groups, they may enter into agreements with the library which determine points in its personnel program. As individuals, they are the reason for the existence of a program.

Library literature recognizes that only large libraries can implement a full-scale personnel program, provide a separate personnel office, and make use of even a portion of the techniques, forms, and records which other personnel writers describe. Large libraries could be the laboratory for the profession in the personnel function of administration, discovering and testing the best procedures for use by it. Small and medium-sized libraries may then select, adapt, amend, or expand techniques publicized by large libraries, according to their particular needs. It is possible that the smallest units might make the best actual use of knowledge growing out of large library programs, since their administrators have direct personal contact with all members of their staffs.

Looking into the future to what seems an inevitable growth of regional and even national cooperation between libraries,[11] effective organization and management of larger groupings undoubtedly will include personnel administration as a special division of administrative structure. Its current recognition by large libraries almost certainly assures that possibility. It will give the same kind of assistance to individual units of the combinations which operational administration is already providing in existing regional setups in functional offices such as reference work and in service offices such as public relations.[12] In addition, it is probable that such an expansion of a specialized field of work will provide ambitious librarians with another administrative level to which they may advance.

There seems to be a general seeking for more stable organization of personnel administration in order to deal effectively with the twin problems of securing adequate staffs for libraries and for keeping staff members working happily at the multitudinous and heterogeneous tasks of which library work is composed. The seeking is good to see, indicating unwillingness to continue on the wavering ath of expediency which led nowhere for a long time. It may be a painful period to live through, and puts a heavy burden on the librarians responsible fo: further developing personnel administration as a specialized function of librarianship. There is no reason to suppose, however, that they will not meet the challenge which faces them successfully.

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