The term administration is usually used with an inclusive meaning, to embrace all of the activities having to do with the use of manpower and materials to attain the objectives of an organization or institution. Organization—the grouping of work into operating units (i.e., departments, divisions, sections) and the establishment of lines of authority for supervision and other controls—is one of the aspects of administration. Planning, staffing, coordinating, directing, budgeting, and reporting are other terms frequently used to describe specialized aspects of management or administration. All of these areas are subjects worthy of continuing investigation.

The literature of administrative organization is replete with maxims or principles of administrative organization. Some of these proclaim that administrative organization should provide for unity of management, a limited span of control, delegation of authority commensurate with responsibility, a hierarchy of positions, relatively few levels in the hierarchy, grouping of employees on the basis of homogeneity of activity, both line and staff functions, and facilities for coordination. Somewhat less frequently quoted principles are: delegation of authority should be as far down the line as is possible; delegation of authority without adequate controls is irresponsible management; and the responsibility of higher authority for the acts of its subordinates is absolute.

Considerable difference is attached by different writers to the usefulness of formulations of principles of administrative organization. While most of the textbooks and many articles refer to them as principles to be considered, there is little or no suggestion as to the relative weight to be attached to any principle; or to the procedure to be followed when principles conflict. The principles seem to be useful in rationalizing a particular administrative organization. One critic says:

The author is Professor of Librarianship, School of Librarianship, University of California at Berkeley.
"It is a fatal defect of the current principles of administration that, like proverbs, they occur in pairs. For almost every principle one can find an equally plausible and acceptable contradictory principle. Although the two principles of the pair will lead to exactly opposite organizational recommendations, there is nothing in the theory to indicate which is the proper one to apply." Furthermore, rarely if ever is a single basis of administrative organization consistently followed in the main divisions and also throughout the various subdivisions of an institution.

Span of control has been widely discussed in reports on organization and in surveys of administrative organization. The size of the span of control of an administrative officer is affected by such factors as the abilities of the officer (knowledge of operations concerned, speed of work, ability to change rapidly from consideration of one problem to another), the nature of the work supervised, the number of personnel in the operating units, the level in the hierarchy, the geographic location of the units supervised, and the stability of the organization. These factors lead to such generalizations as that, other things being equal, the span of control varies directly with the ability of the officer and the stability of the organization, and inversely with the complexity of activities, the size of the operating units, the level in the hierarchy and the scattering of the units geographically. The testing of the application of any of these factors to library situations is eminently suitable for research and study.

Another of the major topics of discussion in library literature on administrative organization and equally worthy of study is the basis of departmentation. Among the bases of departmentation are: function (acquisition, circulation, reference, etc.), activity (order, repair, extension, etc.), clientele (children, adults, undergraduates, etc.), geography (branches), subject (fine arts, history, technology, etc.), and form of material (serials, audio-visual, documents, etc.).

The work of Frederick Taylor, Frank Gilbreth, and many others focused attention upon efficient methods of performing work. These are still fruitful avenues of investigation, and the present emphasis upon "work simplification" is evidence of continuation of these lines of inquiry. With the publication of the Hawthorne studies a relatively new emphasis in the study of administration developed. Much of the emphasis in investigation was shifted from work and its organization and management to the worker. "Human relations" broadly describes the emphasis that is currently being placed in much of the research literature of administration. The effort is to find the optimum con-
Research in Organization and Administration

ditions under which people work effectively. Supervision, morale, and communications are some of the terms frequently found to categorize these relatively new fields of research in administration.

"Social scientists have been contributing more and more to our understanding of leadership and the behavior of people within formal organizations," begins the foreword of a recent brief survey of research findings. The bibliography of this report lists 153 books, pamphlets, periodical articles, research papers, and technical reports, and five bibliographies bearing imprints 1953 and 1954 and running from nineteen to ninety pages.

Since an administrative organization exists only to contribute to the attainment of the objectives for which the library exists, it seems reasonable to assume that necessary steps in investigating the effectiveness of library organization are to formulate precise statements of objectives of the library or libraries being investigated; to examine the activities which contribute to the attainment of the various objectives; and, finally, to attempt to find some objective measures of the contribution of various activities to the stated objectives.

While lines of inquiry into the attainment of objectives which are stated as value judgments may yet be developed, the present writer is not aware of any significant research development along these lines in library literature. For factually stated objectives the concept of "efficiency," defined in terms that relate the input of energy (as measured by manpower in terms of man-hours) to the output of measurable product (meaningful units of work) seems to offer some possibilities for research.

In applying the "efficiency" concept it would seem to be a valid assumption that the administrative organization which produces the largest output of a desired product of the same standard of quality with the least input of manpower and materials (and at the lowest unit cost), while maintaining desirable standards in the use of human and other resources, would be the most desirable. Other related assumptions are apparent. For example, if a change in administrative organization, with the same input of manpower and materials, while maintaining desirable standards in the use of human and other resources, produced a product of higher quality at the same cost, this changed organization would seem to be superior to the former one.

The term "operations research" is one of several terms applied to the type of research in administrative organization and management which formulates alternative choices, and for each makes projections of the input and cost of manpower and materials and the output of

[143]
work of defined standards. The purpose of this type of administrative research is to provide management with the tools of administration which facilitate the selection of alternative means of achieving defined objectives. Data of these types will obviously be pertinent only to the particular institution and its own operating procedures. If and when institutional objectives and their resulting operations and products are standardized, such research findings may be directly applicable among institutions.

A recent report which seems to make a substantial contribution to the literature of library management, and which uses some of the approaches suggested in the foregoing paragraphs, has been published by the City of San Diego. An example of the method used in the study of circulation work will suffice to illustrate the approach. On the basis of time studies of circulation it is estimated that the use of a different work procedure would make an annual saving of 12,834 man-hours of clerical and subclerical time, or a total saving of $24,087. “In addition, 2,139 professional hours in the branches would no longer be devoted to clerical duties but would be available for other professional service to the public.” This saving is offset partially by the cost of new equipment, which ranges annually from $9,800 to $11,350, depending upon differences in the cost of rented or purchased equipment and the method of charging depreciation.

An example of the application of the principle “that duties be performed by the lowest salaried employee capable of performing them adequately” is given, where the estimated cost of performing a simple process by each of four levels of classified employees ranges from $8,567 to $22,008 per year. The report adds, in this connection, “The results of the measurement study can and should be used to weigh the economic value of many other duties in the library.”

A study previously reported in Library Trends shows the estimated cost of a series of manual operations in a group of libraries with the cost of the operation performed by the use of the photoclerk. An interesting by-product of the series of studies is a brief section, “Management implications of the photoclerk,” based upon reports of the cooperating libraries.

In the area of financial management the chief aspect of research that has not been adequately covered in recent issues of Library Trends is that in the relatively new field (since the Hoover Commission reports) centering around the performance budget. While the traditional budget estimates current expenditures in terms of salaries and wages and other objects, the performance budget is designed to
estimate the amount of money needed to perform an anticipated volume of specific kinds of work. For each major type of work, estimates of unit cost are made; and the product of the volume of work and the corresponding unit cost equals the estimated amount of money required. Since the performance budget requires adequate data on units of work, as well as unit costs, few libraries are yet in a position to make full use of performance budgeting.

A study of the costs of operating bookmobiles, in the planning stage for almost two years, is now under way. Uniform definitions of terms used in segregating costs have been adopted, (although not always followed because of varying conditions). Emphasis in the study is on the costs of operating and staffing the bookmobile, and resulting unit costs, rather than upon unit costs in terms of services performed.

In summary, the present writer has found few examples in print of research in library organization and management that have not been previously reported in Library Trends. On the other hand he has visited several libraries where specific application of the techniques involved in the concept of efficiency in library management had been carried out. Most of these involve the revision of operating methods, such as those of charging and discharging, the elimination of duplication of operations; the use or development of new equipment, such as the photoclerk; and the rearrangement of the sequence of operations to eliminate unnecessary movement of materials or of manpower. There is undoubtedly a considerable number of libraries where a beginning has been made toward the improvement of management operations. Where there are obvious savings in manpower without accompanying increases in cost or reduction in the standards of work produced, the improvement in management is obvious, without the necessity of demonstration through studies of lowered unit costs. Nevertheless, publications showing the results of research in library management in a variety of types of situations, including the almost untouched field of human relations, should be one of the goals of individual library administrators, as well as of professional organizations, state agencies, and similar groups.

References


