

**Findings of the
External Research Project on Support Staff Issues**

April 1990

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PREFACE

“The most treacherous enemy ofresearch is what philosophers call ‘the natural attitude.’ our capacity to live daily life in a way that takes for granted the objects and activities that surround us. Even when we encounter new objects in our environment, our tendency is to experience them in terms of categories and qualities with which we are already familiar.”

-Shoshana Zuboff, The Age of the Smart Machine

One of the main design characteristics of this work was that it would seek out organizations that were in different industries that related to the Bank’s work rather than picking only one industry and doing it in depth. The value has been two-fold. First, the breadth of work done by the Bank could not have been found in any one other industry. Second, the contrasting approaches to the issue at hand has lent insights otherwise impossible to see.

The challenge of this work has been not to draw conclusions too quickly based on known frameworks, to allow the contrasts to be uncomfortable long enough to see beyond the initial conclusion, especially when it was only the shadow of an old, familiar framework and to give the “natural attitude” no opportunity to settle in as new and different approaches were presented and thus, seeing the familiar through unfamiliar perspectives, to gain new insight.

Executive Summary

Background

The purpose of the External Research Project is to seek out alternative practices which describe how other business organizations address and manage similar circumstances now extant in the Bank. In addition to reporting these practices, the Analysis section attempts to present the data which has led to the conclusions suggested, and make recommendations to the Bank where appropriate.

Once the project was defined in scope, attention was turned to the selection of several external sites to participate in the survey. It was decided that organizations from different industries would be used so that the many functions of the Bank would be represented. Each site selected for participation had to be a leader in its field and produce an end product that is related to the Bank's work. Working within this framework, eight organizations were identified for participation in the survey.

The recommendations contained in this report are based on two assumptions about the constraints of the Bank, i.e., forces which cannot be changed; and any actions recommended or taken must recognize them.

1. The Bank is committed to maintaining its nationality mix, and personnel policy tends toward establishing and maintaining it.
2. The Bank is considered a home for staff, not a step in a larger career which could lead to leaving the Bank.

The recommendations made here are intended: (1) to make existing staff more effective by providing a properly organized and well managed environment, or (2) to increase flexibility by providing mechanisms that encourage movement even within the strong tendency toward employment protection. The means will need to be creative and innovative. And whatever means are chosen will need support as old attitudes are changed through new behavior patterns.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion: Support tasks are part of the total business process and cannot be organized as if these tasks operate alone. Changing the role of the support staff without looking at the whole work process can be meaningless and even lead to inefficiencies.

Recommendation: Establish the review process of examining the entire work of a unit in order to reassess organization, staff levels, and task responsibilities as used by the work review team as the norm for reevaluation and reorganization of a work unit.

Conclusion: Support staff in the Bank are expected to deliver a far greater range of tasks than similar staff in other organizations.

Recommendation: Carefully weigh the total job, including breadth and depth of tasks and the number of supervision and other outside influences before agreeing to add tasks or make other changes to a job.

Conclusion: Long term satisfaction with secretary roles requires:
(a) the inclusion of associate level tasks;
(b) that these tasks are valued and compensated; and
(c) that there is an investment in building relationships between support staff and professionals.

Recommendation: Ensure support staff participate in the substance of the work. Work review teams must look at opportunities by which the support staff can participate directly in the work of the unit, even to the point of placing critical (although well defined) tasks and essential information in the hands of support staff.

Recommendation: Measure and evaluate Bank managers on their human resource management practices through objective measures.

Recommendation: Leverage the existing capacity and interest of the support staff by enriching jobs vertically and loading associate tasks in current support staff jobs, and review grading (and subsequent compensation) to properly reflect these so that salary for support staff who are doing associate level work reflect comparable salary ranges in other organizations.

Recommendation: Sharpen and focus the definition of the individual support staff jobs currently too broad for uniform performance across all aspects.

Conclusion: Most other organizations do not provide career paths, but they also do not block opportunity.

Conclusion: Movement needs an environment of opportunity. This is where:
(a) movement is considered normal;
(b) reward is for real performance and qualifications;
(c) personal initiative is acceptable behavior; and
(d) policies and procedures support movement, i.e., line managers can make it happen.

Conclusion: Attrition rates are influenced by the market and organization values, work habits, and attitudes. Policies can change only some of these.

Recommendation: Train managers on performance management setting goals and holding people to them, and proper procedures and attitudes for arranging for dismissal of a staff member. Likewise, they should be trained on the rights of all the individuals involved in a divisional case, including their own.

Recommendation: Shorten the time of assignments for support staff to two years to encourage horizontal development.

Recommendation: Create a program through which support staff could serve an internship in other organizations for 6, 12, 18, or 24 months.

Recommendation: Encourage career mobility with other organizations.

Recommendation: Create support internships that allow an individual to serve for 2 years in a support staff capacity with the requirement that he or she must leave for at least 2 years before returning to the Bank.

Conclusion: Office technology functions are considered basic and normal like pushing a pen. Real gains (and value) are placed on using the technology to solve new business problems.

Recommendation: Create a special external education fund for support staff who wish to become familiar with computer technology which supports university courses in appropriate subjects.

Recommendation: Seek ways in which customized applications of technology which have been developed to solve Bank business problems can be leveraged to other parts of the institution.

Conclusion: The technology support structures of the researched organizations shows no pattern.

Conclusions: (1) Ratios are meaningless without knowing how the work is done.
(2) Demand for support staff is:
(a) inversely proportional to the availability and use of associates (or junior staff);
(b) inversely proportional to the autonomy of senior staff; and
(c) directly proportional to the presentation quality and complexity of the reports.

Recommendation: Establish reducing costs as precedence over keeping support level to higher ratios down or even to a specific level.

Recommendation: Create work planning and management tools for support staff work.

Conclusion: Values play a strong role in the allocation of support staff, even within the context of P&L.

Recommendation: Acknowledge the values of the Bank and their impact on the allocation of staff.

Conclusion Position control acts to retain not limit staff.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

“Three main factors are having a powerful influence on today’s workplace, and help account for the timeliness of looking at work organization issues. First, the demographics of the work force are changing. More women are employed as higher level staff and more men as support staff. Along with changing demographics have come expectations that the work environment will be compatible with family life and personal growth. Secondly, technological innovations have transformed the way work is being conducted and have led to new patterns of work by all levels of staff. Finally, the Bank’s 1987 reorganization dealt mainly with structural change and its impact on higher level staff. Part of the unfinished business concerns the implications of the Bank’s new organizational structure on the working environment for support staff. The Staff Association’s 1988 Attitude Survey showed that there was substantial concern among all levels to staff about the work environment in the post-reorganization Bank.” So begins **The Companion to The Work Review Project**.

As a part of the Work Review Project, the External Research Project sought way in which the situation as defined in the statement on the factors influencing today’s workplace could be addressed by researching other companies where these factors are equally as present. Through this research, it was hoped that ideas that have been tried elsewhere could be found, examined and placed within the context of the Bank’s expressed needs.

Purpose

Thus, the purpose of the External Research Project is to seek out alternative practices which describe how other business organizations address and manage similar circumstances now extant in the Bank. In addition to reporting these practices, the Analysis section attempts to present the data which has led to the conclusions suggested, and makes recommendations for the Bank where appropriate.

Methodology

Once the project was defined in scope, attention was turned to the selection of several external sites to participate in the survey. It was decided that organizations from different industries would be used so that the many functions of the Bank would be represented. Each site selected for participation had to be a leader in its field and produce an end product that is related to the Bank’s work. Working within this framework, eight organizations were identified for participation in the survey.

The organizations all rank in the top of their respective industries, and their staff perceive the organization to be preminent. All of the sites are located in major metropolitan areas in North America or Europe.

A script was developed to guide data collection. Although detailed, the script was designed to serve as an impetus for discussion. (A script can be found in appendix 1.)

As a result, the topics covered were consistent across all organizations, although specifics often contained unique ideas. Typically, the individuals interviewed at each site included, the Vice President of Human Resources, staff in the Human Resources area, the Vice President of Planning and Budget, Planning director and Line Managers. First line supervisors and support staff were interviewed in some locations.

It was agreed with each participant that the specific information on the organization would not be identified with their names. Thus, the names used in this report are not real, but they try to capture something of the organization to aid the reader.

The results by organization are reported in detail under the section called Detailed Findings. Discussion of findings by issue have been reported separately in the section called Analysis where conclusions, when drawn from the data, are also presented. Implications to the Bank are presented after each conclusion as appropriate.

The Detailed Findings section provides insight into the sites visited. Following an initial overview of the site, each site report is divided into three broad subject areas: Context, Overall Policies and Practices. Context refers to the actual work performed at the site, the work environment, i.e., inter-office relationships and attitudes intrinsic to the site and finally the site's employment market. Overall Policies concerns itself with staffing levels--how they are determined and what criteria are used. Finally, Practices, presents some of the site's policies and procedures regarding employment at the site, employment benefits, and staff development.

Definitions

Throughout this report the word associate is used. It has two meanings within the confines of this report:

- (1) when it refers to the task being performed, it means one which involves knowledge specific to the work and use of limited judgement: and
- (2) when it refers to the position doing the work, it means those staff who are not yet in the senior ranks because the individual is a beginner, early in his or her career, and as a junior, needs experience to reach the senior rank or because the individual does not have or need the necessary education or experience to be of the senior rank, but the work still involves some specialized knowledge and judgement. This can be thought of as roughly equivalent to the Bank's 16 to 19.

In the first case is the beginning consultant in a consulting firm or the beginning investment officer in a bank. Although having the necessary education, experience and performance are lacking to qualify him or her for the senior ranks. In the second case is the paralegal who performs work involving some skill and some judgement, but who does not have the education to be an attorney.

Determining which meaning applies should be clear from the context.

The report also uses the words support staff. In each case, it refers to the staff of the organization who performs activities in support of the principle work. In some organizations it is staff classified as “non-exempt.” In other organizations, it is less precise. In reading the report, support staff can be thought of as roughly equivalent to the Bank’s 12 to 15.

In referring to the higher ranks, different terms have been used depending on the industry. For example, in the case of the legal industry, the word attorney is used. In other industries, it is senior staff. These are roughly equivalent to the Bank’s 20 and above depending on the number of years of experience or the placement in the organization which means the individual worked in the main operations of the business or in the support functions of personnel, administration, etc.

Assumptions

The recommendations contained in this report are based on two assumptions about the constraints of the Bank, i.e., forces which cannot be changed; and any actions recommended or taken must recognize them.

(1) The Bank is committed to maintaining its nationality mix and personnel policy tends toward establishing and maintaining it.

(2) The Bank is considered a home for staff, not a step in a larger career which could lead to leaving the Bank.

These two factors dominate over even such factors as equity. Together they create an environment where staff come to the Bank and remain for long periods of time, usually to retirement. As a result, where some organizations use attrition as a means to bring new skills in or reallocate positions to area of higher need, the Bank can do this only through displacing staff, and is extremely reluctant to do so. As skill mixes and work loads vary over time, flexibility is desirable, but not obviously attainable.

The recommendations here are intended:

- (1) to make existing staff more effective by providing a properly organized and well maintained management environment, or
- (2) to increase flexibility by providing mechanisms that encourage movement even within the strong tendency toward employment protection. The means will need to be creative and innovative. And whatever means are chosen will need support as old attitudes are changed through new behavior patterns.

ANALYSIS

This section looks at the whole and discusses the principle learnings of the project. Detailed findings are included in the site reports which follow this section.

Each organization performs its business differently. This is due to the differences in end products and also the differences in values for each organization. Because the selected organizations are in different businesses, seeing the contrasts between them lent as much understanding the issues as the data itself because it forced looking at unfamiliar things from unfamiliar points of view. Contrasting data will be presented as much as possible to assist the reader in understanding the learnings of this project.

Each of the organizations visited has been coded to assure confidentiality. Rather than use a numeric or alphabetic code, names have been used. They have been selected to help the reader more easily remember the detail and to make the text more readable.

Altruistic Ltd. is a private foundation known for its outstanding position among private, non-profit foundations and for its meticulous grants operation. It can be characterized by the high value that it puts on integrity and excellence--striving for both internally and externally, through contact with the public and other financial sources as it pursues its mission. Decision making is decentralized with peer review only. It is non-profit and regulated.

Baker Institute is a project driven organization, dedicated to providing research funds to the developing world. It is characterized by its essentially bureaucratic nature with some decentralized decision making and some central decision making. Personal status within the organization is important and because the organization does not have a profit motive to influence this factor, it is manifested by office space, assignment of a secretary, etc.

Classic is a large research oriented university known especially for its research results. It is driven by ideas and has an image of leadership, productivity and sensitivity to human needs. Internally professors operate independently, each pursuing his or her own activities. The organization relies heavily on students--graduate and undergraduate--to provide associates to accomplish the work.

Dynamo and Co. is recognized around the world for its excellence in journalism and publishing and is driven by the market. It emphasizes creativity, innovation, and excellence in all that it does. As a result, the organization consistently garners high performance marks from both its employees and industry peers. The production cycle for its magazines is well defined and carefully staffed with specialists in each area and at each step.

Eagle & Eagle, a law firm specializing in international banking, values consistency and the relationships necessary to assure it, as well as excellence in performance. Review of work takes place at a local level and varies in intensity according to the project and the individuals working on it. Otherwise, work is independent, Paralegal and other associate tasks are heavily depended upon.

Fidelity, Inc. is a big eight accounting and consulting firm. It has a highly competitive environment internally with senior staff operating independently. It places high importance on serving its clients and doing whatever is needed to perform the work and to do it well. It is built around the development of a pipeline of senior staff and, as such, uses associate staff to reduce costs while bringing in revenue.

Gerard Trust is a large global financial institution with 89,000 staff. It offers banking, investment and information services. Business performance is extremely important, yet managerial attention to human resource issues is considered essential to good business and is evaluated and rewarded.

HEC, Ltd. is an international development bank located in Europe offering international and national financing and development.

The rest of this section is divided into four units

- (1) Organizing the Support Work: Making Existing Staff More Effective
- (2) Movement: Increasing Flexibility in Other Ways
- (3) Technology
- (4) Characteristics That Affect the Need For and the Allocation of Support Staff

Recommendations follow related conclusions.

Organizing Support Work: Making Existing Staff More Effective

The title of this subsection suggests that support work can be organized by itself. The data shows that it is an integral part of the business and how the work of the business is organized and managed. Separation of support staff work can be done by arbitrarily categorizing the tasks, but it cannot be organized as if these tasks operated alone. A matrix listing tasks (See Appendix II) show how the Bank compares to the sites visited. *In general, the work of the Bank shows a richer set of tasks assigned to support staff than to other organizations.*

At Dynamo and Co. the section secretaries are integral team members. They participate in weekly planning meetings and assist in the follow-up. At Eagle & Eagle, the secretaries are also involved in the detail of the work--so much so that client relations can be served directly through the work of the secretary, and therefore assist the attorney directly. *In both cases the support staff can act as assistants in the work because they participate in substantive work and meetings.*

At some organizations, associates perform tasks that support staff do in others. For example, associates do simple administrative tasks and final cleanup of documents at Classic, as well as research, writing and other true associate level work. At Eagle & Eagle, support staff do billing, research and client relation work. These tasks are done by senior staff and associates at Fidelity, Inc. Where Fidelity sees the associates as a cheap source of labor, Eagle & Eagle uses values support staff to perform the same type of role.

Clerical specialists require planning and delegating work. If a central word processing unit is to be practical, senior staff must allow time to fit its use into the schedules of their units. If document finalization and assembly is done elsewhere, time, again, must be allotted. Both Eagle & Eagle and Fidelity, Inc. use central word processing units and assemblers to complete their

reports. At Fidelity, the secretaries never deal with the text and so do not have intimate knowledge of the substantive work. At Eagle & Eagle, secretaries always deal with the drafts and do remain in contact with the work.

Dynamo and Co. has analyzed its total production process, including the work of the writers. As a result, there is a clearly defined process which allows for delegation of tasks to lower level staff, but everyone at all levels understands and supports this process.

A work unit at the Baker Institute has decided to have its support staff redefine and renegotiate their roles as the unit brings in technology, and presumably time is freed up. This idea leaves a good first impression because it brings the task of definition down to the level of the person doing the work--who has the greatest understanding of it. However, most support staff do not know the potential of technology, let alone ways in which senior staff can be assisted, unless senior staff is also involved.

To organize support work is to organize the whole process. To understand how they are needed, support staff tasks cannot be separated. *The work must be looked at in the whole.* Support staff tasks cannot be separated from those of senior staff when being analyzed. It is the entire work flow that must be examined and changed, or changes will be created that do not lead to improvement. Looking at the whole, real increases in effectiveness are possible and more likely to succeed.

Conclusion: **Support tasks are part of the total business process and cannot be organized as if the tasks operate alone. Changing the role of the support staff without looking at the whole work process can be meaningless and even lead to inefficiencies.**

This conclusion argues for the approach that has been taken by the work review study of looking at the whole -- work of the support staff, work of the higher levels, and the point at which they should come together. Embellishing on this seems unnecessary except to say that the process should not stop when the the work review teams have completed the study.

Recommendation: **Establish the review process of examining the entire work of a unit in order to reassess organization, staff levels, and task responsibilities as used by the work review team as the norm for reevaluation and reorganization of a work unit.**

Conclusion: **Support staff in the Bank are expected to deliver a far greater range of tasks than similar staff in other organizations.**

Recommendation: **Carefully weigh the total job, including the breadth and depth of tasks and the number of supervision and other outside influences before agreeing to add tasks or make other changes to a job.**

Non-document related tasks continue to be a part of the office. Dedicated (personal) functions such as telephoning, greeting guests, making travel arrangements, filing, and arranging meetings

continue. Management functions of supervision, work load leveling across support staff, file design, and attending to administrative needs (for example, tracking down the reason an office is not properly heated one morning) continue. Associate functions such as client relations, billing, and research continue. The routine tasks lead to boredom, others demand judgement and are challenging. When done together, the challenging tasks overcome the boredom of the routine, and the job continues to be interesting and desirable. But these challenging tasks are associate level in nature. At Eagle & Eagle, secretaries to the partners had a good blend of both and were more treated like paralegals as well. They are responsible for all billing and also are expected to know the work of the client and help in the management of the client relations.

Only staff with intelligence, initiative, and high performance are desired when a professional has a choice about a secretary. Yet without meaty work of associate tasks, the job becomes boring. And without continued commitment, the staff member seeks alternatives, and the best find them.

One office manager at Classic, where the secretaries have no associate roles (with one exception noted elsewhere), said, "The secretaries who see their work as a means to an end are happy and even thriving. The secretaries who see their work as an end, are unhappy." Classic is in a market of highly educated individuals, and support roles are often sought as an economic means to another end, such as completing a dissertation. These secretaries were the happy ones. Where there was no other means for a personal sense of achievement through challenging work that was recognized, the secretaries were frustrated and felt undervalued. Said another way, a secretary of 15 years who made it to working with the vice president said, "I'm bored. It is clear you need another area to work in and out of so you can return to it after boredom sets in."

At Eagle & Eagle, however, secretaries seem satisfied and have an expanded role of associate tasks. But these tasks are also valued and paid for by the organization. Secretaries at Eagle & Eagle are compensated as well as the paralegals. Further, there is a long-term, well-established relationship between the secretary and the attorney.

Conclusion: **Long term satisfaction with secretary roles requires:**
(a) the inclusion of associate level tasks;
(b) that these tasks are valued and compensated; and
(c) that there is an investment in building relationship between support staff and professional.

"Good secretaries are hard to find," said Altruistic, Ltd., Gerard Trust and Fidelity, Inc. Attracting new people to a career that does not seem to be a career is a growing difficulty. Yet secretaries to senior staff need to be developed through experience, and this experience needs years of retention and retention of the best. The traditional secretarial role continues and is especially needed at the top of an organization. To assure that a pipeline of fully developed individuals is ready to assume these positions, there must be an environment which can prepare them and retain them in this role. Preparation means giving the opportunity to practice the skills needed. Retention is the harder aspect to assure and means developing an environment of long term satisfaction.

These are accomplished through involvement in the work -- and serious involvement. That is to say, the secretary had real knowledge of what was happening because she or he was a part of planning meetings and even work sessions, or because she has a responsibility for an area that was exclusively hers, and thus communication, critical for real working relationships, with the senior staff was assured.

Being responsible for something which is valued in the work gives an increased sense of self-worth and therefore increases effectiveness since those who value themselves more are free to think, and this type of thinking leads to new approaches to the work that were never thought of before. Unless this type of thinking is going on, no new ideas can occur. When they occur in an environment of positive evaluation (such as the environment created in the work review process as defined today), increased effectiveness must be the outcome.

Max DePree says in his book Leadership is an Art, "To be accountable we need to have the opportunity to contribute to the group's goals. We need the opportunity to share in the ownership of the group's problems and also the inherent risk. We need to have our contributions measured according to previously understood and accepted standards of performance, and this transaction need to take place in an adult-to-adult relationship."

Relationships are built through working together. Children have no difficulty in developing relationships, because they do something very serious between each other -- they play. And play to a child is a serious thing. In the world of an adult, work takes the place of play as the serious thing done. When adults work together, they have the opportunity to develop relationships. As the work is valued, so the relationships are made easier and quicker. Thus, placing support staff in roles which are valued to the work, this objective of building relationships is accomplished without artifice.

Recommendation: Ensure support staff participate in the substance of the work. Work review teams must look for the opportunities by which the support staff can participate directly in the work of the unit, even to the point of placing critical (although well defined) tasks and essential information in the hands of support staff.

While outside organizations visited did not feel the obligation to develop careers, most did feel that the opportunities for obtaining and even creating new positions was important to the organization, as well as to the individual. Through this type of environment, work needs were met and individuals received real rewards, e.g., promotions, more desirable tasks, etc. that were given in response to initiative, good work, and qualifications.

And reward for real performance and qualifications was mentioned by every organization. The Bank must assure that these are also primary in staff selection (when filling positions internally). However, when promotion (the preferred way to move) does not appear to be connected to performance or qualifications, the efforts of achieving long-term satisfaction are subverted.

Assuring good human resource management practices in this area of rewarding real performance and qualifications can be and is monitored by other organizations by measuring morale, staff

relations problems, abnormal attrition rates, etc. Management bonuses are even tied to these measures.

Objective measures such as the management practice survey done by Clark Wilson Publishing Co., attitude surveys as previously done at the Bank, numbers and characteristics of staff relations, and attrition rates are all real and quantitative. As quantitative measures, they are not immune from interpretation, but they are more objective than anecdotes, connections and “intuitive” judgement which seems to characterize today’s management evaluation in the Bank.

Recommendation: Measure and evaluate Bank managers on their human resource management practices through objective measures.

The external research showed that while some organizations used associates or entry level staff, who would eventually become senior staff, to do support tasks as a part of their jobs, other organizations used support staff to do some associate level tasks. When the latter happened, the support staff salary ranges overlapped with the associate salaries. When entry level staff were hired with the assumption that there was to be a learning period as in the first case cited above, the entry level salaries were within the salary ranges of the support staff.

Recommendation: Leverage the existing capacity and interest of the support staff by enriching jobs vertically and loading associate tasks in current support staff jobs, and review grading (and subsequent compensation) to properly reflect these so that salary for support staff who are doing associate level work reflect comparable salary ranges in other organizations.

Today in the Bank, support staff often find themselves in a job with objectives that conflict with one another. For example, being responsible for an administrative process while also serving as a secretary to several staff members often places the staff member in the difficult position of trying to satisfy the individuals who are who are making the immediate demands while at the same time assuring that an administrative process is services well and in a timely manner. Such fragmentation undermines the value of expanding the work.

At Eagle & Eagle, the secretaries to the partners are given responsibility for the critical administrative process of billing, as well as, secretarial work and associate level work. Both the breadth of tasks is focused by the fact that at this level they have a single boss. At Dynamo, administrative work is often broadened to become a full time job so the support staff member is focused by the work itself.

Recommendation: Sharpen and focus the definition of the individual support staff jobs currently too broad for uniform performance across all aspects.

Movement: Increasing Flexibility in Other Ways

No organization visited considers the support level jobs as steps in a career, but rather as opportunities. None feel an obligation to provide development toward a career. But none placed

obstacles in the path either (except for the natural ones which are a result of required educational backgrounds, e.g., law degrees, Ph.D.s, etc.) Promotion is generally based on qualification only. Attrition is viewed as a way to allow for openings and thus promotion within an organization.

In other words, support staff roles can prepare an individual for some jobs in the organization, but they are not planned as such. They are planned to meet business needs. But when personal initiative and expertise qualify an individual to move (and even leap) into another area, this is not prevented through policy.

Conclusion: Most other organizations do not provide career paths, but they also do not block opportunity.

Positions in the administrative side of the house were often used to give opportunity for further growth. Dynamo and Co. could identify many positions that had been created for those who had shown initiative and potential. Classic was very proud of the fact that 50% of their administrative structure was staffed by former support staff members. (Although this was an organization which had a unusually high educational background in their support staff because of the local market.) Each organization could point to someone who had made it into the administrative side.

Movement across grades and even skipping grades was permissible at all locations as well. Selection was based on qualifications and was often a reward for personal initiative. Qualifications, however, were always cited as the critical criteria for selection. The line manager's assessment of the individual's performance and the need of the business unit were the driving forces to making movement happen.

There was also a means for a line manager to make this sort of thing happen in a way that was rational and yet, relatively painless. At Dynamo and Co., the line manager had only to have the Human Resources and Compensation Departments price the position, look at the P&L, and make the decision. In this organization, Human Resources considered its role to help the manager get his job done and to assure equity for staff.

Conclusion: Movement needs an environment of opportunity. This is where:
(a) movement is considered normal;
(b) reward is for real performance and qualifications;
(c) personal initiative is acceptable behavior; and
(d) policies and procedures support movement, i.e., line managers can make it happen.

(A note about personal initiative. All but one of the organizations visited was North American. The remaining one was European. In all of them, initiative was valued even when it came from a woman. Proportionally, most support staff are women. At the Bank, personal initiative from a woman is not always welcomed. It is often referred to as aggressive behavior, as reported in the

Staff Association's report on the Status of Women in the Bank of November 1989. Thus if a support staff member who is female shows initiative, it is often perceived as "too aggressive" and no action is taken in the best case and punitive action is taken in the worst. This is one area where the issues of women and support staff overlap.)

At most of the organizations visited, the attrition rate was considered normal to low. At Classic and Fidelity, Inc. this was not the case. They both dealt with an attrition rate of 25%, and for different reasons.

Classic existed in a market of highly educated individuals who were constantly moving in and out. They considered the attrition rate as normal and not due to problems in their organization. It also did not seem to interfere with recruitment.

At Fidelity, Inc. the situation is the opposite. They are deeply concerned about the attrition rate and have recently put in place programs to deal with the issue. They are also suffering with recruitment, finding it difficult and increasingly expensive to simply hire individuals, let alone retain them. Fidelity, Inc.'s environment is one where the secretary is almost totally estranged from the work of the consultants. All reports are done through a central word processing unit, and the consultant never has access to a secretary until well into his or her career in the organization. As a result, there is no understanding of how a secretary can be used and therefore, no relationship between the secretary and the work of the consultant. Also the heavy use of associates and junior consultants permits the consultants to get support tasks done without a secretary. As a result, there is no dependency, no delegation, no growth and no retention.

Conclusion: Attrition rates are influenced by the market and organization values, work habits, and attitudes. Policies can change only some of these.

The Bank's environment tends toward retention of staff. Given the importance of good human resource management, preference to retain staff should not be considered as a reason to keep staff regardless of performance. This is amplified by norms for firing an individual which include an indirect but severe censure of the manager attempting the dismissal. This has contributed directly to the unwillingness to enter into a dismissal action. But no organization has a perfect fit between the staff and the positions offered. There must always be a means to allow for corrections that are done in a professional and rational manner.

One can speculate that this censure comes out of an opinion that the manager has avoided giving feedback, thus short-changing the staff member along the way to understand their problem and attempt to correct it. True in some cases, it does not describe all the situations. Censure leads to line managers avoiding dismissal procedures all together. If managers understood their rights, as well as their responsibilities, they would be more likely to deal more aggressively with performance problems.

Measuring managers on their human resource practices (as noted above) supplements this recommendation by giving the Bank clearer measures and feedback to managers which models the behavior managers should be taking with their own staff. Further, this recommendation will

serve as a reminder that the institution reserves the right to take dismissal action in severe performance cases--a situation that is often ignored.

Recommendation: Train managers on performance management setting goals and holding people to them, and proper procedures and attitudes for arranging for dismissal of a staff member. Likewise, they should be trained on the rights of all the individuals involved in a divisional case, including their own.

Movement in and out of the Bank should be an acceptable behavior pattern. Even for long-term staff, there are reasons why a period of time outside the institution would actually be beneficial to one's career. In today's Bank, this is not even considered, let alone encouraged, for anyone but the most promising higher level staff members. Yet, several means can be utilized to encourage movement in and out.

If jobs become more focused, the support staff will need more opportunities to obtain breadth in their experiences. Simultaneously, this will add to the movement possible and therefore to flexibility. Even two years was longer than some of the external companies visited had. Classic for example, only asked that an individual remain for one year with the hiring unit, and even then would facilitate movement if the fit was considered impossible.

Recommendation: Shorten the time of assignments for support staff to two years to encourage horizontal development.

There are many international organizations even in the Washington, D.C. area that, if staff could view them equally, may open up movement and facilitate attrition with no compromise to the Bank's long employment policy.

Mobility can also be achieved on a temporary basis. By allowing support staff to work elsewhere in an internship program, their opportunities and experience are broadened. The challenge here would be to assure that the work of the receiving organization would indeed serve to broaden the individual, making them more valuable to the Bank, rather than a step backward to a less challenging environment. The objectives of each internship would need to be clear and agreed between all parties. For example, a support staff member in Industry might gain enormous insight by working in the private sector--insight valuable to the work of the Industry Sector

Recommendation: Create a program through which support staff could serve an internship in other organizations for 6, 12, 18, or 24 months.

Recommendation: Encourage career mobility with other organizations.

Another approach would allow individuals who are between their Bachelor's degree and an advanced degree to participate in the work of the Bank before they continue on their career. (There might even be an option for secretarial school graduates to gain a valuable "first address" through this program.) The receiving division should be required to provide a work program for

the individual to show what the work and the specific substantive task would be. This would be developed jointly by the responsible support staff member and the division chief of other appropriate manager. They should be managed primarily by support staff. This would serve to relieve higher levels of the responsibilities, but also reinforce the value being placed on support levels.

The number of these internships should be controlled to a certain maximum percentage of the number of support staff so that their presence would not overburden the long-term staff who manage them. The program could begin very slowly by using a portion of positions which open up from normal attrition and grow to a set percentage of support staff over several years. This would allow for the program to be tested and refined. It would not create more positions than those already in place in the support ranks.

The work to be done would need to include some substantive work to attract the right type of individual. This would allow the Bank to gain support staff who have abilities to do associate level work but at a lower level of compensation, and may lead to salary savings. Their involvement in associate work would further model the objective of giving this type of work to support staff. When these individuals return to their studies and eventually to their work, they will have had a real experience with what the Bank does. This could become an effective means to educate young people about the Bank which is particularly important for U.S. citizens who understand little of the Bank's work or purpose.

Recommendation: Create support internships that allow an individual to serve for 2 years in a support staff capacity with the requirement that he or she must leave for at least 2 years before returning to the Bank.

Technology

Technology affects more than office support staff. In the area of office technology, senior staff composing at the keyboard impacts secretaries and word processors. Other areas have broader reach. Sending telexes and faxes affects the telex room. Group editing on-line changes relationships between senior staff. On-line airline reservations impact travel office staff, but may ease or increase the work of both senior and support staff. Searching against numeric or text data bases is a growing area for support staff, yet it impacts the work of information resource specialists in Records Management.

The data about access to technology does not show any relationship on the numbers of support staff. (The single exception is Dynamo and Co. where the entire work flow was analyzed and automated resulting in a change from a ratio of 50:50 to one of 60:40.)

Understanding and being able to use office functions of the technology is considered normative. Recruitment at all the locations included some testing for computer literacy. At Classic, they felt that knowing technology was no more valuable than other skills, and they had no local support structure which was formal and valued higher than other support staff.

Value was ascribed to knowing how to apply technology to the problems of the business and in knowing corporate processes and data bases. Whether this was in using the applications of the organization, e.g., internal data base searches or the internal processes that had been automated, or applying the technology to a new business need. This could be in, for example, Lotus or desk top publishing. The value seemed to be placed on connecting the technology to the business needs so that greater effectiveness could be achieved with, and through the technology. One person used the phrase, "the secretaries have actually helped the organization run up the learning curve of technology by being the ones who had to use it in their work and are now applying it to other processes." All organizations ascribed value to those who are competent at the frontier of usage (but not technology per se).

Conclusion: **Office technology functions are considered basic and normal like pushing a pen. Real gains (and value) are placed on using the technology to solve new business problems.**

If support staff are more directly involved in work, as is recommended above, their understanding of business needs will increase. If they are also conversant with the technology, then the application of it will be the natural outcome. To be conversant enough to see the application means understanding the concepts and potential of technology. This requires courses that are broader than skills courses. These would include concepts and principles of technology and its application. An external education fund for support staff would provide this kind of training.

In today's Bank, external education dollars are at the discretion of the manager with few directions. As a result, support staff rarely see the potential let alone gain access to it. Emphasis through a designated program will provide a dependable opportunity for those with interest.

Recommendation: **Create a special external education fund for support staff who wish to become familiar with computer technology which supports university courses in appropriate subjects.**

Recommendation: **Seek ways in which customized applications of technology which have been developed to solve Bank business problems can be leveraged to other parts of the institution.**

Classic has no formal support structure at the local level, using associates to accomplish this work. Gerard Trust, Eagle & Eagle, and Altruistic, Ltd. use support from a central computing function even if this is part of a group which provides other administrative functions beside computer support. At Altruistic, Ltd., a support staff can enter the technical support ranks directly through promotion. And in the case of Gerard Trust, the central group is a part of the larger local organization serving several local groups. They recruit for these staff from the market, and there is no option for support staff who have interest and aptitude in this area. Dynamic and Co. use a centrally supplied organization as well, but they also promote support

staff into local support roles when these individuals show interest and competence to do so. The remaining organizations have no support structures.

Conclusion: The technology support structures of the researched organizations shows no pattern.

Characteristics that Affect the Need for and the Allocation of Support Staff

The proper ratio of support staff to higher level is argued as if there is one. The external research asked about ratios and about the factors that might be related to them. To understand the ratios of each of the organizations and what they mean to the Bank, several factors which were believed to be related to the ratios were gathered and reported. In order to understand them, they must be looked at together. We will begin with the characteristics of the organizations visited in Table 1. The ratios of the organizations (support staff to higher levels) will be presented in Table 2. The factors that affect the need for support staff are shown in Table 3. Lastly, Table 4 will present the factors which affect the allocation of staff.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Organizations

	Baker Institute	Altruistic, Ltd.	Dynamo & Co.	The Bank	Eagle & Eagle	Gerard Trust	Classic	Fidelity. Inc.
Characteristics								
Industry	International Development	Foundation	Publishing	Banking	Law	Banking	Research Institute	Consulting Firm
Prime Values	Status Service Corporate Knowledge	Integrity Service Corporate Knowledge	Innovation Equity Corporate Knowledge	Nationality mix Efficiency Corporate History	Consistency Relationships Accuracy	Profitability Good Human Resource Mgmt.	Leadership Product	Profitability Product
Profit/ Non profit	Non	Non	Profit	Non	Profit	Profit	Non	Profit

To better understand the ratios, the prime values of each of the organizations are listed. Values enter decisions and thus, influence how an organization creates, organizes and manages itself. The values are listed in the tables in the order in which they appeared to be operating. That is, the most important one is listed first and so on.

Status symbols such as office space and reporting staff are most important to those at Baker. It seemed to be more important in internal decision making than service which is the espoused value. Knowledge of the organization, gained by staff working for many years, is also valued.

Integrity clearly operates in every decision at Altruistic. It impacts internal decisions as well as those affecting the products of the organizations.

Dynamo has built its organization around models and policies which encourage innovation. Being first in the market has a strong impact on market share and revenue, and this requires that the staff feel free to be innovative and that the company is responsive to the market through innovative ideas. Equity among and across staff is also highly valued and enters all personnel decisions.

Being an international organization, the Bank places high value on maintaining nationality mix. This is reinforced (and even enforced) by the Executive Directors who are from the member countries. The management also places high value on efficiency by attempting in every decision to make a positive rate of return on it. History of the organization (as opposed to knowledge which applies to the day to day working of the organization) is considered important and often is used in personnel decisions as well as management decisions.

Eagle & Eagle understands the close relationship between satisfied clients and revenue. But it sees this as coming from consistency, i.e., once obtained as a client, maintaining a consistent (and good) performance is seen as crucial to this relationship continuing. Accuracy is sought in every activity with resources devoted to assuring this.

Gerard Trust values a strong financial position, but one which is balanced with good human resource management, believing that good people management is good for business.

As a partnership, Fidelity values its ability to make money. This seems to be done by bringing in junior staff (associates) who can be billed out even if they are only doing clerical work, to providing strong educational development to all associate and senior staff (but not to support staff who do not generate revenue), and by being ruthless in cutting costs and non-producing staff.

Table 2: Ratios of Support Staff to Higher Level Staff at the Organizations

	Baker Institute	Altruistic, Ltd.	Dynamo & Co.	The Bank	Eagle & Eagle	Gerard Trust	Classic	Fidelity, Inc.
Ratios								
SL:HL	1:1.08	1:1.17	1:1.63	1:1.81	1:1.89	n/a	1:4	1:6
Estimated Secretary: HL	1:1.08	1:1.17	1:13	1:1.81	1:1.97	1:4	1:4	1:2
Size	600	630	7,000	6,300	530	89,000	8,300	240

The ratios reported represent the total number of support staff to the total number of higher level staff across the organization. It reflects what support is available, including those functions

which are centralized, and provides a relative guide. It does not represent the ratio of secretaries to higher levels.

Associates are included in the higher level numbers. Associates by task are counted in both support staff and associates depending on how the organizations used each.

The line marked Estimated Secretary:HL is an estimated figure, guessed at for each specific work area based on an extrapolation of the interview information. One should place a 70% probability of accuracy on these figures. Some may be better, some less so. They are used to focus on the difference between secretaries assigned to senior staff and all support staff who work for the organization.

The ratio of support staff to higher level is succinct and appears to be clear. Yet across the industries interviewed, it varied from 1:1.08 to 1:6, and understanding its meaning demands close examination of the work being done, how it is done, and the values of the organization. Among the many factors looked at, seven were, or seemed to be, in some relation to the ratios. Not all proved to be so through the information gathered in this survey.

Table 3: factors that Affect the Need for Support Staff

	Baker Institute	Altruistic, Ltd.	Dynamo & Co.	The Bank	Eagle & Eagle	Gerard Trust	Classic	Fidelity, Inc.
Factors								
% Access to Technology	<10	100	100	100	10-30	90	100	Variable
Client Relations Importance	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	H	M	N/A	H
Length of Document	30	3-10	1-10	10-100	3-200	100-200	3-60	10-20
Presentation Quality (Complexity)	M	M	H++	M	H	H	L	M
Autonomy of Senior Staff	M	H	M	L/M	H+	M	H+	H+
Review	M	M	H++	H	L	M	L	L
Use of Associates	L	L	M	L	H	H++	H++	H++

The **Percentage of Access to Technology** show the percentage of staff who actually have technology at their desks. In the case of Fidelity, Inc., the word variable means that it is not uniform throughout the organization. However, in this organization, technology was available for the asking.

Client Relations Important indicates those companies where relationship with the client was considered to be high (H) or not applicable (N/A). Eagle & Eagle and Fidelity, Inc. value client

relations. Eagle & Eagle uses support staff in this area. At Fidelity, it is done solely by the senior staff.

Length of Document is the estimated or average length of the document that supports the main business process. It was used as a very rough measure of how much paperwork is done.

Presentation Quality (Complexity) is representative of the amount of work that must be done to put the main document into its final form. For example, as a publishing firm, Dynamo's final product must be of the highest quality (H++) both in terms of content (which can be said for all) and of presentation or artistic layout -- where the format conveys information as well as the words. Eagle & Eagle and Gerard Trust are also considered high (H) because their work goes out of the firm. Fidelity at moderate (M) also has work that goes out of the company, but often the client does the final document production, rather than Fidelity. Classic is considered low (L) because the research papers and even books go out in draft form and a publishers deals with the presentation. The others produce documents that are principally used internally which demands only the moderate (M) classification.

Autonomy of Senior Staff is a measure of the relative independence of the senior staff. Altruistic has only peer reviews and is given a high (H). Eagle & Eagle, Classic, and Fidelity are all given very high (H+) since there is no review of the work beyond the senior staff member in charge of the project. (review of lower level work is not a part of this measure.) In the other organizations, review is part of the work.

Review is another look at a process related to the autonomy of the professional, yet is not quite the same. In the case of Dynamo, the review process is high (H) and very structured, since publishers must produce on a strict schedule. However, senior staff have more autonomy than this indicator suggests. Likewise, the review process at Altruistic is moderate (M), yet supports high autonomy in that the professionals are able to select what they work on without a review process at all and based only on the overall objectives set by the organization.

Use of Associates indicates the availability of junior staff or associates to senior staff for any type of work. Classic, Fidelity, and Gerard all have a very high (H++) access to associates. In the case of Classic, it is in the form of students. In the cases of the others, it is junior staff who are breaking in or "paying their dues." At Eagle & Eagle, the use of associates is considered high (H) with a dedicated staff as career paralegals. Dynamo uses associates moderately (M), but these are staff who play these roles as a career. Associates are almost nonexistent at Baker, Altruistic and the Bank.

Most striking is the relationship between the ratios and the use of associates. Although an inverse relationship, it is a clear one. As associates are available to do lower level senior staff work, they also pick up some support tasks relieving the need for support staff. Vice versa, when support staff perform associate roles, their numbers increase.

Less consistent, but worth examining, is the autonomy of senior staff which somewhat parallels the review requirements. As the autonomy goes up (and review goes down), the apparent need

for support staff decreases. This may also reflect a lack of bureaucracy and its attendant record keeping.

Looking only at the profit organizations, presentation quality (including complexity of presentation) increases the need for support.

The remaining factors are believed to play a role, but the data does not reflect this. High client relations, for example, is done exclusively through professionals at Eagle & Eagle.

Conclusions:

- (1) Ratios are meaningless without knowing how the work is done.**
- (2) Demand for support staff is:**
 - (a) inversely proportional to the availability and use of associates (or junior staff);**
 - (b) inversely proportional to the autonomy of senior staff; and**
 - (c) directly proportional to the presentation quality and complexity of the reports.**

Use of associate staff was clearly one way companies were able to accomplish low level professional work but also keep support staff numbers down. The intent is usually to educate the associate of every aspect that is possible during this period. Thus they do a lot of support work and the ratios of support to senior staff go down. Since the Bank does not consider itself as a developer of careers especially of its higher level staff, introducing an associate group for the purpose of reducing support staff ratios seems inefficient, inappropriate, and more costly. Introducing associate staff to accomplish part of what higher level staff do would reduce costs only if higher level staff were displaced.

The remaining points of senior staff autonomy and presentation quality are a part of the whole work process. No generic solution can be prescribed. As noted earlier, the work must be reviewed through a process which looks at it all together.

In summary, artificial manipulation of staff ratios doesn't make sense. Work review for gaining more effectiveness should use cost reduction as a secondary objective, but never a pre-set ratio.

Recommendation: Establish reducing costs as precedence over keeping support level to higher ratios down or even to a specific level.

Dynamo, with a highly predictive production schedule, examined their production process thoroughly and have every job defined in relation to what needs to be done. The jobs were specialist jobs, and numbers are calculated on the basis of what part each plays in the process.

Fidelity, on the the other hand, with unpredictable work loads, takes a more organic approach. An office manager makes a day-to-day assessment of who has work and who is less than fully employed. Whenever a mismatch is identified, the office manager negotiates with the senior staff to redeploy the support staff to where the work really is. Cooperations is good because status in this organization is not measured by the availability of a secretary.

Classic uses only ratios, and finds that day-to-day inequities are met through a “pitch-in” attitude of the support staff themselves.

While no direct guidance can be gained from these examples, there is clearly a need for some tool to assist in planning support staff work. At the very least, planning it at all will begin rationalizing the allocation of support staff. A process for this should be a follow-on product of the work review study.

Recommendation: Create work planning and management tools for support staff work.

Factors Which Affect the Allocation of Support Staff

In table 4, the same critical characteristics of the organizations are shown, but with the factors that enter the allocation process. The ratios are again presented at the bottom.

Table 4: Factors Which Affect the Allocation of Support Staff

	Baker Institute	Altruistic, Ltd.	Dynamo & Co.	The Bank	Eagle & Eagle	Gerard Trust	Classic	Fidelity, Inc.
Characteristics								
Industry	International Development	Foundation	Publishing	Banking	Law	Banking	Research Institute	Consulting Firm
Prime Values	Status Service Corporate Knowledge	Integrity Service Corporate Knowledge	Innovation Equity Corporate Knowledge	Nationality mix Efficiency Corporate History	Consistency Relationships Accuracy	Profitability Good Human Resource Mgmt.	Leadership Product	Profitability Product
Profit/Non-Profit	Non	Non	Profit	Non	Profit	Profit	Non	Profit
Factors								
Budget	√	√		√			√	
P&L			√		√	√		√
Position Control	√	√		√		√		
Proportion of Dollars	√	√						
Equity			√					
Relationship					√			
Ratios								
SL:HL	1:1.08	1:1.17	1:1.63	1:1.81	1:1.89	n/a	1:4	1:6
Estimated Secretary: HL	1:1.08	1:1.17	1:13	1:1.81	1:1.97	1:4	1:4	1:2
Size	600	630	7,000	6,300	530	89,000	8,300	240

Budget indicates that there is a limit to the amount that a line manager can spend, and this is determined in advance. Check marks indicate that the factor is operative. All of the non-profit organizations use budget as a factor in allocation.

P & L is distinguished from budget since it also includes revenue and profit. Only the profit organizations use this, but all do.

Position Control is a policy statement that positions are limited to a certain number, not to be exceeded for any reason. This is used at all the non-profits. In addition, Gerard has what is called head count which is set at the beginning of the year. It does not appear to work like position control, as it is flexible at the time of negotiation, rather than pre-set. However, it is firm until the next round of negotiations. (This is also the organization which monitors the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of temporaries used to check for need or abuse of the head count limit.)

Proportion of Dollars is where the budget is further constrained by attempting to achieve a certain balance between the grant moneys and the administrative portions to the total available. This is operative at only Baker and Altruistic.

Equity is the principle of bringing issues of equity across all staff in any personnel decision which includes the identification of a new position. Although most would subscribe to it if pressed, only Dynamo clearly stated that this is operative at all times and in all decisions.

Relationship describes the principle of assuring that every policy and decision is one that supports the maintenance of good client relationships. Eagle & Eagle considers this to be paramount to their organization. It pervades every aspect that was discussed with them and obviously influences decisions regarding support staff.

Looking first at the profit sector, values also seem to impact support staff ratios. Eagle & Eagle values the consistent relationship with clients. Knowing that a secretary is part of this relationship, resources are devoted to this so that it is not compromised. This influences the way work is assigned, but the allocation scheme supports it as well. In addition, relationships between secretaries and attorneys are valued and encouraged, and long term relationships are maintained internally as well. They place enormous emphasis on getting the “right chemistry” between boss and secretary.

At Dynamo, high value is placed on equity. Given the nature of the work process, the demand for high presentation quality, and the detailed definition of the work process, the ration does not reflect equity alone, but equity is a part of the allocation process. At both Eagle & Eagle and Dynamo, morale is very high, as is productivity.

The high ratio for Fidelity, Inc., must be reviewed from the perspective of profitability. Associates and junior staff are used heavily and are billable; support staff are only rarely so, and at very low rates by comparison. Letting junior staff and associates do support tasks under billing

rates produces more revenue as well as providing a strong pipeline of potential senior staff. Here, morale is low with an attrition ratio of 25%.

P & L is not the complete story in allocation. Values that impact morale, and therefore productivity, enter the allocation formula indirectly. When done positively, productivity rises along with support staff ratios. When done negatively, hidden costs of low morale such as out of line attrition begin to erode the cost reductions from lower numbers of support staff.

Conclusion: **Values play a strong role in the allocation of support staff, even within the context of P&L.**

In the Bank, the value of nationality mix and long term stays, and the subsequent reluctance to initiate dismissal procedures is strongly apparent.

Recommendation: **Acknowledge the values of the Bank and their impact on the allocation of staff.**

It appears that position controls may also have an impact on ratios. Under the weak budget management style of the Bureau, position control might seem to be retaining rather than restricting numbers. It is not clear from the data why Altruistic has a low ratio. Having suffered a downsizing eight years ago, they are capped today by policy, and retention may be a residual survival behavior pattern. More data is needed. (Or this may just mean bureaucracy needs support staff, and bureaucracies believe in position control.)

Without position control, Classic uses a high ratio of senior staff to support. But this may be more affected by the access to associate staff which are (1) easily available and (2) chargeable to projects, thus producing more budget from different revenue sources.

Conclusion: **Position control acts to retain not limit staff.**

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