SPEC Kit 323

Socializing New Hires

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SURVEY RESULTS

REPRESENTATIVE DOCUMENTS

Program Evaluation

Professional/Staff Development Resources

SELECTED RESOURCES

SURVEY RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

What comprises socialization in research libraries and archives? Black and Leysen define socialization as "how librarians assimilate the culture, values, and perspectives of the library, the university, and the profession."[1] Ballard and Blessing describe socialization in a broader context as "the process by which employees learn about new jobs, roles, and the culture of workplace."[2] Organizational culture, which has a significant impact on the socialization process, plays several key functions: shaping organizational identity; fostering collective commitment; building social stability; and allowing people to make sense of a new environment.[3]

Given the challenges that newcomers experience in research libraries and archives, effective socialization is critical. Such challenges may include a highly demanding workload; time management; communicating and working within a large bureaucracy; acquiring knowledge and skills in specific areas (such as collection development and liaison work); and experiencing the transition from school-to-work.[4] Research libraries and archives have used various strategies to facilitate effective socialization of newcomers. Black and Leysen note that effective recruitment is critical to meaningful socialization, and assert that libraries "are increasingly at a disadvantage if they do not actively work to ensure the best fit between candidate and institutional profile."[5]

Janice Simmons-Welburn and William C. Welburn assert that formal orientation programs are an important component of socialization for newcomers, as they satisfy information needs "in the face of uncertainty."[6] Research libraries also use mentoring and residency programs to acclimate newcomers (including librarians of color).[7]

Designed to complement SPEC Kit 239, *Mentoring Programs in ARL Libraries*,[8] the SPEC survey on socializing new hires explores broader organizational socialization programs and activities in ARL member institutions. The purpose of the survey is to investigate the progress made in ARL member organizations to establish or enhance socialization programs and activities (such as orientation programs, mentoring, residency appointments, and staff development sessions directed at organizational acculturation) for all newly hired, paid employees. It explores the availability and types of programs, activities, and resources currently offered in ARL institutions; staff involved in designing and coordinating socialization programs and activities; goals and budget for socialization programs; length of participation in programs and activities; evaluation and assessment of programs; and benefits of socialization programs, activities and resources.

Availability and Types of Socialization Programs, Activities, and Resources

Sixty-five of the 126 ARL member institutions (52%) responded to the survey. Fifty-seven respondents (88%) report offering programs, activities, and/or resources for socializing newly hired, paid employees into their organizations. While eight respondents (12%) report that they do not currently offer socialization programs or activities, some of those institutions nevertheless noted the value and importance of such efforts. For example, one library indicated that planning socialization programs will be the first priority for a new director of staff development.

Research libraries and archives increasingly focus on effective socialization for *all* new hires. Fifty-two institutions (91%) reported that their programs and activities are designed for all newly hired, paid employees. Orientation sessions and related resources are the most widely reported and are typically offered to all new hires. Forty-seven of the 51 respondents that use orientation checklists specifically report using them for all new hires.

While the majority of respondents offer some socialization activities for all newly hired, paid employees, certain programs are much more likely at this time to be offered to librarians only. For example, 28 organizations (50%) indicated that they offer formal mentoring programs; of those, 22 report that mentoring programs are designed specifically for librarians and only six provide formal mentoring for all new hires. Respondents describe specific approaches (formal and informal) to facilitate mentoring for librarians. Examples include a "buddy" system to facilitate social networking, peer mentoring, and assigning library faculty mentors to guide new librarians through the tenure process.

Research libraries and archives use a variety of methods and approaches for socializing new hires. Thirty-eight respondents (68%) reported using staff development sessions to enhance the socialization process, while 22 organizations (39%) report using a pairing system (other than mentoring) to facilitate job shadowing or coaching. Only seven institutions (13%) report offering a residency, fellowship, or similar program. Twenty respondents (36%) report using other methods and approaches for all new hires, and/or for specific categories of staff. Selected examples of activities for all new hires include library tours, lunch and/or coffee with administrators and/or peers, and meet and greet events. Selected examples of activities for librarians include faculty committee meetings, informal meetings for untenured faculty, and a "new librarians' roundtable."

Responding institutions also offer socialization programs as standardized, group events and/or as individualized, one-on-one activities and sometimes offer programs both ways. For example, 21 respondents offer individualized job shadowing and/or coaching (only two respondents describe job shadowing and/or coaching as standardized activities). On the other hand, more often than not, orientation and staff development sessions are standardized offerings; the reverse is the case for formal mentoring programs, which are much more likely to be individualized. It is of note that in all cases some libraries offer a specific program in both ways.

Respondents reported that their libraries also provide (and are currently developing) a variety of resources to support socialization programs and related activities. Examples include orientation checklists; policy manuals; brochures; training documents on topics such as collection development and instruction; audiovisual materials (such as a welcome video from the Dean of Libraries); welcome packets and notebooks; and electronic sources (such as a Wiki listing various procedures and policies). While selected materials (such as faculty handbooks) are targeted to librarians, respondents indicated that socialization resources are generally developed and offered for all new hires. Responding institutions noted that resources such as faculty handbooks and policy manuals are increasingly available online (replacing physical copies).

Designing and Coordinating Socialization Programs/Activities

Design and coordination of socialization activities are generally a shared effort, with complementary responsibilities. For all categories of staff, the immediate supervisor plays the key role in *coordination* of socialization activities, and the HR/Personnel Officer follows closely. Although the immediate supervisor has a similar level of responsibility in program *design* for other professional staff and support staff, the HR/Personnel Officer has a notably stronger role in the design of socialization programs for librarians (23 responses for the HR/Personnel Officer, as compared to only six responses for the immediate supervisor).

Noteworthy are how frequently library committees have responsibility for socialization, especially for librarians (16 institutions), and how varied the committees are. The importance of preparation/support for tenure or continuing status responsibilities

is the likely reason, as evidenced by the number of comments citing promotion and tenure committee involvement in socialization activities. For support staff and other professional staff, the Staff Development Officer is somewhat more likely to be involved than a library committee (eight to nine responses for the Staff Development Officer, as compared to seven for a committee).

Goals and Budget for Socialization Programs

By far the primary goal is to communicate the organizational culture of the library, as cited by 54 institutions (95%). An additional seven goals were selected by 56%–75% of respondents, including those relating to: performance evaluation, promotion and tenure, inclusion, retention, training in specific areas, organizational culture of the campus/parent institution, and professional culture of librarianship. Among other goals described, several institutions seek engagement and identification with the larger entity, communication of the library's strategic plan and mission, and introduction to the local community.

There is a sense from respondents' comments that budgeting is not a major issue. Many institutions fund socialization activities from general library funds/operating budget or a combination of library, university, and private funds. Occasionally, the library staff association will fund specific events. A number of institutions report that little or no budget is needed, with costs limited to staff workload.

Length of Participation in Socialization Programs and Activities

The time frame for completing each socialization activity is logically shaped by the nature and scope of each program. Socialization for new hires is an ongoing process, and can vary based on the individual needs of each new employee. For example, respondents describe the individualized nature of job shadowing or coaching, and note that the relationships developed through this activity can last well beyond a specific time frame. As mentoring can also facilitate the development of long-term professional relationships, the time frame for this activity also varies considerably. Other socialization activities have more specific time

frames. For instance, orientation programs are typically completed during the first six months to one year on the job. Respondents also noted that orientation activities are often completed in stages, starting with a checklist on the first day or week, and involving meetings (over a period of several weeks or months) with staff from the human resources unit, the immediate supervisor, and/or other colleagues.

Evaluation and Assessment of Socialization Programs

Fewer than half of the respondents (24 or 43%) have tools in place to solicit feedback from participants for evaluation, with an additional 13 (23%) reporting that they plan to develop a process. Surveys, individual interviews, and focus group meetings are typical approaches. Other tools include evaluation forms, breakfast or lunch with the dean or administrators, and exit interviews.

Research libraries and archives utilize various measures of success, with feedback from participants as the largest single response. Also cited are employee and supervisor satisfaction, morale (with one institution specifically seeking improvement as measured by an annual ClimateQUAL® survey), retention rates, and achievement of tenure. One respondent has two simple measures: does the mentee volunteer to become a mentor; and does the mentee encourage other new staff to participate in the mentoring program.

Benefits of Socialization Programs and Activities

Respondents report a wide variety of benefits accrued from socialization programs and activities (for the organization as a whole, as well as for new hires). Socialization programs and activities facilitate general orientation and acclimation to the organization and its culture. Through meeting and getting to know colleagues more quickly, new hires establish a network of contacts within and outside the organization. Respondents also note that new hires receive the necessary tools and support to learn and do their jobs effectively, which enhances and increases productivity. Survey respondents also reported that socialization programs facilitate learning about how to be successful in the promotion and tenure process, which can

increase retention. Socialization activities can also shape and reinforce a collegial environment, which benefits the entire organization.

Conclusion

The purpose of the survey was to investigate the progress made in ARL member organizations to establish or enhance socialization programs and activities. Survey results clearly demonstrate that socialization activities are widespread and growing in research libraries and archives. The volume of response and detailed sample documents provided are indicative of the prevalence of existing activities and institutional commitment to these programs. There is a perception of the critical importance and value of these activities to the enhancement of organizational success. The plethora of comments on the benefits of socialization programs indicates that ARL members highly value these efforts.

Orientation programs are ubiquitous. Staff development is second only to orientation as a socialization strategy for all new hires. Somewhat surprising is the relatively low number of institutions that report having a residency or fellowship program.

We were specifically interested in the current status of mentoring programs, because there is ARL data from 1999 in SPEC Kit 239, *Mentoring Programs in ARL Libraries*. At that time, only 26% of respondents reported formal mentoring programs. In the current survey, half of the respondents report the existence of a formal mentoring program, representing a doubling in twelve years. Several cite university mentoring mandates for faculty. In addition, 39% have other pairing arrangements, such as job shadowing or coaching. We anticipate that mentoring will continue to expand as a socialization tool over the coming years.

It is clear from the comments that there is a great deal of interest in improving existing programs and offering new activities. ARL institutions have produced an impressive array of concrete resources that are now available through this SPEC Kit to support the development or expansion of a variety of socialization strategies. The results are rife with creative ideas to enhance existing programs. The authors identified several practices that would strengthen their institution's mentoring and orientation activities. It is not, however, clear from the results which activities produce the best results, as little formal assessment has occurred.

Survey results point to the need for development and future research in the area of assessment. More than half of the respondents have or plan to develop tools for evaluation of socialization programs; however, feedback from participants through surveys or other means is by far the most utilized approach at this time. Without more concrete assessment tools, it is difficult to point to the more successful strategies.

In particular, further research is needed to evaluate the impact of socialization activities on retention and success in tenure or continuing status. Each is cited by more than two-thirds of respondents as an important goal. Similarly, promoting an inclusive workplace is a highly rated goal. It would be valuable for libraries to know the most effective strategies to support those goals, which requires determination of outcome measures and appropriate assessment techniques.

Based on the generalized responses to the budget queries, it is clear that libraries have made a significant but largely unmeasured investment in socialization programs in terms of staff time and other resources committed to these activities. As libraries develop greater capacity for assessment, it may prove fruitful to collect data to evaluate the return on investment for the individual strategies of orientation, formal mentoring, less formal pairings such as job shadowing or coaching, staff development, and residency programs.

Recognizing the importance of socialization efforts, more than one respondent proposed that libraries need to focus more on the continuing socialization of all groups of employees, not just new hires. That too is an area for future exploration.

ARL member institutions are strongly engaged in a wide variety of socialization activities and report significant benefits to both the individual and institution. Continued growth is anticipated.

Endnotes

[1] William K. Black and Joan M. Leysen, "Fostering Success: The Socialization of Entry-Level Librarians in ARL Libraries," *Journal of Library Administration* 36, no. 4 (2002): 4.

[2] Angela Ballard and Laura Blessing, "Organizational Socialization through Employee Orientation at North Carolina State University Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* 67, no. 3 (2006): 240.

[3] William Sannwald, "Understanding Organizational Culture," *Library Administration & Management* 14, no. 1 (2000): 8.

[4] Joanne Oud, "Adjusting to the Workplace: Transitions Faced by New Academic Librarians," *College & Research Libraries* 69, no. 3 (2008): 256–63.

[5] William K. Black and Joan M. Leysen, "Fostering Success," 12.

[6] Janice Simmons-Welburn and William C. Welburn, "Organizational Entry, Sense Making and New Professional Employees in Academic Libraries." Paper presented at the 11th national conference of the Association of College and Research Libraries, Charlotte, NC, April 10–13, 2003.

[7] William K. Black and Joan M. Leysen, "Fostering Success," 9–11.

[8] Barbara Wiffkopf, *Mentoring Programs in ARL Libraries*, SPEC Kit 239 (Washington DC: Association of Research Libraries, Office of Leadership and Management Services, 1999).