



## PERSPECTIVES ON. . .

# • Collegiality, Collegial Management, and Academic Libraries

by Philip C. Howze

A "collegial management style" is becoming a standard qualification for library management positions. Collegiality and congeniality are not the same. This article addresses the differences between these concepts, as well as why collegiality must be articulated as an organizational value if the collegial manager is to be an effective leader.

One of the many and interesting talents library leaders possess is the dissemination of buzzwords. Many of these themes were, and still are, good ideas—waiting to be activated with commitment and resources. Current examples of catch phrases that are also excellent ideas include cultural diversity, information literacy, and the learning community. This article revisits one such phrase that has appeared in job advertisements for management positions in academic libraries, *collegial management style*.

While collegial management schemes are not new to libraries, a "collegial management style," as a job qualification, is a phrase the use of which is on the rise. A prospective job applicant would do well to understand what having a "collegial management style" means. More importantly, the applicant needs to discover what the phrase means to the interviewers. Buzzwords often fail, in both denotation and connotation, as an effective means of communication. Everyone knows, and no one knows, what collegial management means. Phrases such as this one are most often used to present an appearance or a desired end state, and not a reality. If a high degree of collegiality is already present, then the need to "infuse" the organization with it by hiring a collegial library manager or administrator, particularly through an external search, should not have to happen. To lessen confusion over what collegial management means, libraries need to define and establish a standard for collegiality.

### WHAT IS COLLEGIALLY?

Everything one does as a tenure track librarian revolves around the award of tenure, which was intended to protect faculty from dismissal because of their expression of controversial or unpopular viewpoints.<sup>1</sup> Collegiality, however, comes into question over whether academics would put as much effort into academic freedom and other benefits of tenure for librarians as they would for themselves.<sup>2</sup> What, then, is collegiality?

*Webster's New World Dictionary* defines collegiality as "the sharing of authority among colleagues."<sup>3</sup> Based on a theory of Roman Catholicism, three tenets are included in its definition, voluntary membership, self-governance, and authority vested in the members. Librarians and academics alike mistake collegiality for congeniality, which is defined as "having the same nature, disposition or tastes" as those of other group members.<sup>4</sup>

Further exploration of the collegiality versus congeniality issue shows that congeniality is a more definitive, and therefore manageable, concept. Collegiality is an amorphous criterion, often defined in terms of a Supreme Court pornography test, in which perception is reality. The absence of collegiality, however, is quickly known and readily described when the purpose is to deny tenure. In *Change* it is reported that, "It takes two to be collegial, and the apparent absence of collegiality can be a pretext for discrimination. However, courts have consistently upheld the use of collegiality as a legitimate factor in faculty evaluation."<sup>5</sup> Even the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) "recognizes the danger that collegiality can serve to inhibit dissent and [produce] excessive deference to administrative or faculty decisions."<sup>6</sup>

From the academic's perspective, collegiality is a state of peer regard into which one grows by vicariously learning from one's professors, as graduate students. James Duderstadt observes, "Our current paradigm of graduate education is based on an important, yet fragile, relationship between the graduate student and the faculty that evolves from mentorship into collegiality."<sup>7</sup> Peer regard is most often a constant when it involves those scholars widely considered to be at the "top" of their professions, and with such assignment comes a measure of power. Sandra Rastin comments, "Power is central to collegiality. I argue that once collegiality has been accepted as given in an institution, it too can become a power-laden symbol used to achieve goals."<sup>8</sup> As a basis of power, collegiality (considered here to mean high in peer regard) can be misused to deny group membership to those who think and act differently, personal talent notwithstanding. According to Jonathan Alger, "Collegiality can be a code word for favoring candidates with backgrounds, interests, and political and social perspectives similar to one's own."<sup>9</sup> It is not uncommon, for example, to hear stories of faculty who found out that they were only hired because of pressure to add minorities to the faculty.<sup>10</sup>

Many untenured faculty, not wanting to be cast as bad

Philip C. Howze is Associate Professor & Social Sciences Librarian, Delyte W. Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Mailcode 6632, Carbondale, Illinois 62901-6632 <phowze@lib.siu.edu>

colleagues, carefully avoid any expression of ideas and willingly engage in "being nice" as a substitute for candor. Alvin Snider notes,

We are in an age of compulsory niceness. With increasing regularity, faculty meetings are marked by awkward silence and polite shuffling rather than lively debate. We tell ourselves that arguing a case passionately is the surest way to lose it, and so we sit quietly in our chairs, mumble platitudes, or tell anecdotes rather than risk confrontation by articulating our differences.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, being nice has little to do with being trusted. According to Geoff Troman, "Trust is built on a normal and routine life, and such a life would not be possible without an unconsidered trust that everyday life does not hold major threats; hence, trust facilitates stability, co-operation and cohesion."<sup>12</sup> It is possible that candor, when routinely exhibited, can be woven into the fabric of trust among colleagues. It is also possible, however, that candor could be perceived as confrontational or combative, and the following case demonstrates that, for some, perception is reality.

#### LESSONS LEARNED FROM ACADEME: McCLURE v. UNLV

Piper Fogg summarizes the case of *McClure v. University of Nevada at Las Vegas*,<sup>13</sup> in which Marcella Ann McClure, a virologist, was hired as a tenure-track faculty member in the biology department at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas in 1993. McClure, who brought in \$1.4-million in grants for her research on viral evolution, was denied tenure in 1997. Five letters were in her personnel file, which she was not allowed to look at, in which her colleagues indicated the ways she had failed to be sufficiently *collegial*. A Nevada state court dismissed McClure's claims, ruling that an assistant professor has no contractual right to tenure, and that tenure decisions are up to the university.<sup>14</sup> As of this writing, the Appellate Court upheld the lower court's ruling.

There are many cases like this one, and the unwritten criterion of collegiality has increased in its application. There is a lesson here for libraries; just because such an event as this one may not have happened yet does not mean it will not in the future. As the importance of collegiality grows, the need for library administrators who are also collegial managers will increase.

#### WHAT IS COLLEGIAL MANAGEMENT?

Collegial management, theoretically and in the context of higher education, implies the effective sharing of power. According to David Dill et al., "Power and responsibility for the assurance of educational quality in higher education rest with the collegial parties on every campus responsible for designing, reviewing, delivering, and monitoring students' programs of study that lead to academic degrees."<sup>15</sup> Dawn Watson and Rhonda Hallett discuss collegial management in the context of collegiality itself, and they conclude that, "Collegiality is not based on rigid quantification of outcomes but on shared values, cooperation and collaboration. It should ideally be part of a proactive process concerned with building lateral, multidisciplinary collegial relationships."<sup>16</sup>

Some libraries have had collegial management schemes for a long time. In one instance, Joan Bechtel describes her library's situation, "In 1975 the library was declared a fully functioning academic department with a rotating chairperson.

The chairperson's normal term of office is three years, with the possibility of extending the term up to three more years."<sup>17</sup> In another library, it was reported in *Library Journal* that reference librarians at Berkley's Moffitt Library...are collectively responsible for policy decisions and rotating job assignments.<sup>18</sup> Thomas Gwinup, a reference librarian at California State University San Diego, observed, "Supervision is alien to professionals. They should consult, be judged by their equals, and control their own destinies."<sup>19</sup> Collegial management in libraries may be on the rise as a strategy for coping with economic uncertainty and staffing shortages.

Philip Jay LeNoble provides an excellent description of collegial management style: "Collegial managers thrive in an environment of partnership building, in which each employee is encouraged to suggest and develop ways that will help the entire organization get the job done better or faster. Under the collegial style, responsibility, teamwork initiatives and enthusiasm within the group are best able to grow and thrive."<sup>20</sup>

#### ELEMENTS OF COLLEGIAL MANAGEMENT STYLE

What are the elements of collegial management style, and how do they pertain to faculty librarians? When collegiality as previously discussed is blended with LeNoble's discussion of what collegial management is, the common elements are:

- Group autonomy;
- Personal responsibility;
- Voluntary group participation;
- Results are more valuable than the processes by which they are attained; Professionals do not need "supervisors" because active peer review is present;
- Elected leader keeps group on track;
- Participation is encouraged and rewarded;
- Candor and expertise are highly regarded; and
- Cooperation and collaboration are more important than compliance.

It is much easier to express the spirit of the collegial management than it is to articulate the application. It may be that, in a collegial environment, collegial leaders will naturally emerge. A more reasonable if not desired expectation, however, is that leadership will be shared by all members of the group. A collegial management style is essential to elicit collaboration and cooperation from the group. In libraries, the common ground is service to the users of the library. For a library to establish a cooperative environment, collegiality will need to be articulated in its statement of values.

#### ARTICULATING ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Value statements differ from mission statements. A mission statement defines what an organization is about, or the purpose for its existence. Value statements articulate what the members of the organization believe. "Why we are here" is not the same as "what we believe." It is difficult to develop meaningful value statements that require their imprint on everything a library does to serve its particular community. Expressions of values most easily begin with "we believe" and should be rewarded, not suppressed or punished. Examples of organizational values include:

- Candor;
- Cooperation;
- Innovation;
- Education;
- Respect;
- Fairness;
- Inclusiveness;
- Empowerment;
- Quality; and
- Sharing.

Collegiality is an organizational value, if not an umbrella for all others, particularly in institutions of higher education. When a library values collegiality, the reporting lines tend to blur. They do not necessarily go away; they just become less formal. Organizational values must represent common ground, what all members of the group can accept, if they are to be translated into acts of collegiality.

### CONSEQUENCES OF FAILING TO DEVELOP A VALUES STATEMENT

Libraries express what they value, whether they intend to or not. Budgets are expressions of values. Staffing configurations are expressions of values translated into priorities. To ascertain what a given library values, all one has to do is look at its organizational chart and its budget. Failing to be proactive in developing a statement of values causes the library's mission to become something to which staff cannot relate, not only because the mission statement is often expressed as "organizational aboutness" that is ongoing, but because it leaves out a very important component: the standard of excellence. If a library values something to a standard of excellence, it will support it to a reflective standard.

Because values statements have the effect of defining excellence, prospective candidates for library positions can be given something they can read and to which they can relate, informing their decision of whether the prospective culture is one they wish to enter. A good number of libraries have developed values statements (separate from their missions), which are available on their home pages, including: Texas Tech University; Auburn University; University of Texas at Austin; Washington State University; Vanderbilt University; University of Washington; University of California, Irvine; University of Minnesota; and Marquette University.

Collegial management, to gain a foothold in a given library's culture, must be referenced in a statement of values separate from the mission. Articulating the tenets of collegiality within the value statement can also have an impact on performance appraisal and rewards systems.

### REWARDS, DRAWBACKS OF COLLEGIAL MANAGEMENT STYLE

There are certain rewards and drawbacks of having a collegial management style (CMS) for the library administrator. Some of the rewards include:

- CMS fosters and encourages participation and open communication leading to a rich diversity of opinions and perspectives;
- CMS promotes shared governance through shared responsibility for job tasks;
- CMS rewards cooperation and collaboration;

- CMS recognizes that there is a minimum standard of excellence among participants and the formal meeting of that standard assures group membership without threat of revocation;
- CMS keeps the dialectic of informed reasoning versus methodology active, resulting in brainstorming and innovation; and
- CMS leads to programmatic outcomes that are other-centered.

The promotion of self interest lessens, and focus is placed on how to provide a library service better, faster, for the ultimate benefit of the user through the most efficient means possible, given available resources. At tenure deliberations, the consideration shifts from whether the librarian produced enough to warrant positive tenure consideration, to whether the librarian has been a distinct force for good in carrying out the mission of the library.

Underneath this paradigm shift looms the issue of candor—the good colleague participates in open and candid discussion, not for the good of self, but for the good of the collective. This does not mean a rigid adherence to politeness (although working with congenial or even convivial people would be very nice), nor does it mean the assumption of license to be chronically negative or hostile, either. The biggest reward gained from CMS, and collegiality in general, is the establishment of a milieu of "searching for quality" in which disagreements do not lead to personal grudges, but effective library programs and operations that work for the greater good. Commitment to CMS starts at the top. Librarians who have internalized the need for isolation and self-justification to build a tenure dossier will not, when facing personal evaluation, remember or be remembered for environmental custodianship. Collegiality not only fosters the interactive, but the ecological as well. A positive work environment can result from the collegial milieu.

No management style is without its flaws. There are certain drawbacks to a collegial management style, even though its basis is win-win in nature. Some of these drawbacks include:

- Establishing the CMS milieu is time consuming, particularly in instances where the library environment has more reactionaries than solution-seekers.
- Establishing the CMS milieu can be frustrating, because self-esteem levels among participants often vary. Depending on one's personal orientation, initiatives or proposals are viewed as edicts, orders to be followed; for others, proposals are taken at face value, and then work begins to perfect the thing, if doable.
- Adjusting to CMS can produce heightened confusion among participants, at least in the beginning—and that confusion most often has to do with role definition. The most charismatic collegial manager in the world will be facing a tough crowd of librarians, who often want less comedy and more answers to their questions.
- CMS is best applied in expert systems, and in libraries, few are the librarians who provide direct service to users who actually believe library administrators ever did an honest day of practicing librarianship in their lives. Many fail to realize that library management *is* the practice of librarianship, just a different kind.

This naturally occurring "credibility gap" can result in wasting vast amounts of time before the participants can actually get on with matters of librarianship. There are those lucky few venerated administrators, however, who everybody trusts, likes, and believes. These individuals generally have two things in common: they are perceived as non-threatening, and they have been around for a long time. They possess a working knowledge of library traditions over time, and are the keepers of the corporate memory, both good and bad, and have survived it all. Being well liked clearly contributes to job longevity. At the very least, congeniality is as enduring as its usual accomplice—the status quo.

The primary task of collegial management is to establish and promote the collegial environment. It may be that such an environment could be effectively "invoked" from time to time, in an otherwise competitive library setting, depending on the specific situation, instead of existing in its own right as an organizational constant. For example, reorganizing a major library unit or function, or retrospective conversion, may require a collegial management style to yield the best possible result. All in all, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks if efficiency and service quality are improved.

#### CONCLUSION: BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR

Few things set a trend better than a good buzzword. CMS is one such mantra. Job descriptions that require CMS may reflect a library's desire for a new and improved replacement for a past autocrat. It does not mean, nor even imply, that the organization is ready to receive the collegial manager, nor does it necessarily mean that the organization itself values collegiality. The "sharing of authority," while an attractive notion, is tempered with shared responsibility, which many librarians are not willing to assume. A number of library professionals prefer routines, and cope with change only if it happens in small doses. Granted, it is questionable whether outcomes are improved when power is distributed among the many instead of resting in the hands of a few.

Defining collegiality, however, leads to setting standards for group membership as library faculty. Once admitted to the group, autocracy (at least in theory) is replaced with meritocracy, and the collegial manager is given role definition by the group, even if that definition places less emphasis on "dean" or "associate dean" and more on "first among equals." Collegiality is not congeniality. What causes individuals to like others, from a psychological perspective, comes from the same place inside that causes the assignment of dislike. Either (liking or disliking) is irrational. Trust, as a social construct, is a higher order element of collegiality. It is entirely possible to dislike someone personally and still maintain workplace trust—because the absence of major threats to normative, routine existence promotes trust, not individuals upon whom a personal decision to like or dislike is cast.

If librarians, as members of a faculty group, believe in the principle of collegiality and articulate the value collegiality holds for the group, then it is entirely likely that there will be less systematic or institutional discrimination. The group will use its candor to reject practices in which women of talent are paid less than their male counterparts, or minority group members (those who are anti-deferential to the

status quo) are relentlessly subjected to the negative effects of in-group/out-group dynamics. Collegial management is complex, confusing, and time consuming. No library that does not already have a collegial milieu in place will be spared the effects of implementing one. Distrust will increase, and routines will be changed, at least until new routines are established. Candor will replace the silence that is often mistaken for assent, and continuous review of service quality will add focus to the mission of the library.

The collegial library manager will possess the qualities of charisma, expertise and persuasion to engage the library faculty in work that provides better, faster service to library users. The collegial library manager enables and facilitates. The work process may not always be attractive to the well ordered, but the outcome can be well worth the effort. When searching for a library administrator with a collegial management style, collegiality must be articulated as an organizational value if the collegial manager is to be an effective leader.

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