

Final Report  
of the  
Presidential Blue Ribbon Committee on Staff

Submitted to  
President Charles Alexander  
and the  
Executive Committee of IEEE

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## Table of Contents

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Page</b>
Executive Summary	2
Background	3
General Comments	3
IEEE Computer Society.	5
Society Executive Directors	6
Managing Directors and Staff Executives	7
Recommendations	8
I.    Leave the present Bylaws with respect to staff alone	8
2.    Increase communication and dialogues among staff	8
3.    Entity autonomy will and should continue	8
4.    Directions for the Executive Director come from the IEEE President	9
5.    While encouraging the move towards entity autonomy, there is only one staff of IEEE	9
Conclusions	11

### Executive Summary

The Committee Charter and all of the Committee's discussions were on topics relating only to the employment aspects of salaried staff. Since there has been no such Committee in the history of the IEEE, it is important to note not only what the Committee did, but also what was not part of the Committee's Charter. Not considered were supervision and direction-setting of staff activities by the appropriate volunteers or volunteer boards; the day to day activities of the staff; the volunteer structure of IEEE; the organization of IEEE; and the number of staff positions. What was considered were the ways in which staff are hired, supervised as employees, developed for a career in IEEE imbued with the culture of IEEE, and, in rare cases, terminated from IEEE. All of the Committee members have vast experience in many facets of the volunteer structures of IEEE, but for some, this was their first exposure to the staff side.

The Committee interviewed 16 members of the staff in three separate sessions in Piscataway, Washington, DC, and Newark, and, in some cases, the Committee also interviewed the volunteers who set the intellectual dimensions of the staff assignments. The interviews lasted at least an hour, and the format was arranged to gather information about the perceptions of the interviewees about reporting lines, job conditions, desire and/or chances for movement within IEEE, hiring practices, and any other matters that the participants thought to be pertinent. Following the last interview session, the Committee had extensive discussions leading to the contents of this report. The following five bullets summarize the Committees recommendations.

- The sections of the Constitution and Bylaws of IEEE pertaining to staff and fiduciary responsibility do not need any modification, and should be used as a guide by ExCom
- Communication among staff must be increased up and down the organization with dialogues about staff issues in order to improve operational procedures. The Executive Director should be the convener, in a collegial way, of these dialogues.
- The culture of IEEE is toward autonomy, not central control, but with accountability and responsibility. The Board of Directors and the ExCom should not, and indeed cannot, shed their ultimate fiduciary responsibility.
- The President of IEEE should provide direction to the Executive Director about staff issues. The Executive Director's interactions with staff should be inclusive, recognizing the culture of the Societies and other entities, and the special relationships that have grown up over the years. There should be a tolerance for ambiguity in reporting lines.
- The actuality is that the staff of IEEE is, and must remain, glued together as one corporate entity. The Executive Director is expected to be the "glue" to hold this corporate entity together, while recognizing and working with existing autonomies.

*Leges sine moribus, vanae.*  
(motto of the University of Pennsylvania)  
Laws without customs are valueless

### Background

The charge to the Committee was to examine the staff reporting structure within IEEE and report back to the President of IEEE and ExCom. The following points became apparent quickly: The issues surrounding staff reporting lines had never been looked at by a volunteer oversight committee before. The employment policies of IEEE were established about 30-years ago when IEEE was much smaller, and the human-resource issues much simpler (no EEOC OSHA, ADA, etc.). As IEEE grew, the vacuum surrounding employment practices and reporting lines was filled by customs and practices that differed widely. There is intense defensiveness concerning these practices and customs and intense resistance to any prospects of their being changed. Most of the interviewees were misinformed about such matters as how they were hired, to whom they report, and, in the cases of those who manage others, how their own staff reports are handled. Despite the misinformation noted above, the Committee found no instance in which there were actual deviations from the policies of IEEE, but many of the interviewees had the perception that they were operating outside the system, when, in fact, they were not. There is wide-spread confusion between the volunteer structure of IEEE on the one hand, and the staff structure on the other. The Committee, comprised of individuals with experience in a variety of different organizations, was shocked to see the degree of politicization evident among some of the staff, paralleling the politics of the volunteer side of the house.

### General Comments

Many of the exempt employees of IEEE have been hired without an appointment letter. Several of the interviewees described their hiring by IEEE as follows: After being interviewed by volunteers and/or staff, a verbal offer was made, in many cases by a volunteer, and, after agreeing to take the job, they were walked over to HR where they filled out some forms and they were on the payroll. This loose treatment of the mechanisms of employment has created some confusion on the part of those who think they were hired by volunteers instead of being recommended by the volunteers for the job. In every case of which the Committee is aware, and in every case of which the HR department is aware, a staff member of appropriate level, frequently the General Manager (now Executive Director), in fact signed the forms and, from

a legal point of view, did the hire. However, the perceptions run so deep that even when shown the General Manager's signature on the legal appointment form, some still maintained that they were hired by a volunteer (society president or administrative committee).

Although the Executive Director or his designee was and is often involved in the interview process, there are cases today in which the interview process is conducted with no staff involvement and the Executive Director is presented with a form to sign and an implied "threat" that he has no choice but to sign. No one wants to be put into a "sign or else" situation, and, if collegial communications are increased, no one will be in such a situation.

Similar stories abound concerning initial salaries and annual raises. In some cases, annual reviews of staff are conducted by volunteers and the results of the review and the new salary are sent directly to the HR Department. The HR Department forwards the "PCN" form to the Executive Director to be signed, apparently without informing the volunteers that this is a necessary step. As a consequence, the volunteers 'think' that they are changing the salary. They may not be aware, because no one has ever told them, - that volunteer recommendations do not have the effect of changing any staff member's salary, but only the action of a staff member of appropriate level can do that. This is one case of many in which the Committee's interviews brought items to the attention of the both the staff and the volunteers of which they were unaware.

The Committee believes that putting the type of formality into the hiring/ review/ salary/ raise process that is characteristic of all organizations of which the Committee members are aware will go far towards removing unnecessary ambiguities and enhance cooperation and communications among the staff. This practice may also reduce IEEE's exposure to legal issues.

The present Executive Director, Dan Senese has been promulgating his vision of staff operations under the rubric of the Enabling Staff Culture, the components of which are: put the Member first; customer focus; teamwork; accountability; open communications; respect for fellow employees; carry on all communications in a respectful fashion; continuous improvement; participatory management; reviews from above and below; do what you say you will do. Among the staff of IEEE there is general "buy-in" to the precepts of the Enabling Culture and visitors to Piscataway and customers of IEEE have commented on a noticeable improvement in staff morale and service. Some of the "independent" entity EDs have embraced the new culture and are enthusiastic participants. At the other extreme, there are those who are using trivial points to assert their vision of independence from IEEE, creating a morale problem for those members of the staff who always keep the best interests of the IEEE at heart. Just as it would be inappropriate for the Executive Director to come between volunteers and the staff hired and tasked to help them, it is inappropriate for some staff to hide behind the volunteers in order to shirk their responsibilities as good corporate citizens of IEEE. Such

actions, which, thankfully, are rare, undermine the morale of other employees, and set back the progress IEEE has been making.

The Committee believes that the Executive Director already has the authority to handle any such situations, but requires the backing and commitments of the ExCom so that he is not isolated politically.

The fact that there is a new Managing Director of the Technical Activities Department (TAD) is occasion to re-appraise the situation there, especially since the majority of the society executive directors are located in the TAD area. It is reported that some of the society staff workdays and hours are outside the norms of IEEE flex-time; that some of the policies, including voucher and reimbursement policies, differ among the various societies, and differ from IEEE rules; that some of the society expenses are much higher than they have to be; and that when the Managing Director tries to inquire about these issues, she gets "push back" from some of the society staff. Some of these issues will disappear as the Managing Director gets more experience within IEEE and is known better by the staff. The Committee believes that whatever residual issues remain, good communications which include the volunteers and the Executive Director can correct them.

' The TAD Managing Director indicated that she would like to involve the society executive directors in such cross-society issues like process management of society affairs, birth-to-death of conferences; forecasting; Quality Improvement teams. She likened the situation in TAD with respect to the society EDs to her previous management assignment in which she was the supervisor of staff some of whom had market segment responsibility (society staff) and support staff (the rest of TAD). Within the same organization it was important to keep the staff on an even keel or "have" and "have not" situations develop. It is the Committee's opinion that the communication channels that have been opened will enable the TAD Managing Director and Society Executive Directors to grow into an even more effective working relationship.

#### The IEEE Computer Society

Some members of the Committee regret that we spent as much time as we did discussing the IEEE Computer Society staff. The regret is because the discussion was unnecessary and because the time spent could have been more profitably employed on other issues.

The staff of the IEEE Computer Society is well-managed, responsive to requests from Piscataway, and, in all matters of which the Committee is aware, in conformity with IEEE policy. Furthermore, it is unrealistic to believe that anyone who is presently on the IEEE Computer Society staff in either Washington, California, or Tokyo would want to make a career move to some other part of the IEEE. Consequently, as a reality check, except for perceptions

which will be addressed later, it does not matter if IEEE Computer Society Washington-based staff and the Piscataway-staff of IEEE share the same enabling staff culture because of the geographical separation. In addition, the management of the IEEE Computer Society has a long track record of service to the IEEE, and there were periods in the past when the IEEE Computer Society was better managed than the rest of IEEE.

The Executive Director of IEEE is responsible for all of the IEEE Computer Society staff as well as the rest of the staff of IEEE according to the IEEE Bylaws, but it is both unnecessary and politically inexpedient for the ExCom or the IEEE Board of Directors to affirm this fact. Unnecessary, because as noted above, the IEEE Computer Society is not a problem. Politically inexpedient because such an affirmation would cause more problems than it would solve. Applying the maxim -- "don't fix what is not broke" -- let this issue remain as is. Time and inevitable rollover of staff will cure whatever has to be cured.

The Committee feels that the issues with the IEEE Computer Society staff have been ameliorated as a result of the existence of the Committee and the interviews that were carried out. A start has been made to have regular meetings between T. Michael Elliott and Dan Senese and these should be continued and augmented with other meetings between staff in parallel roles.

#### Society Executive Directors

The Committee interviewed all of the society executive directors. The nature of the interview was to find out their background in terms of IEEE experience or any other experience, to ask them to describe the process by which they were hired at IEEE, who hired them, who has the authority to fire them, who gives them their annual reviews and raises, how they know about vacation policy and other staff benefits. The interview would then shift to open-ended topics.

The Committee was impressed with the dedication and sincerity of all of the EDs their knowledge of IEEE, and their loyalty to their society. All of them understood that their day-to-day tasking was on behalf of the society that they represented. Many of the EDs also saw their role as a corporate citizen of IEEE.

From one ED: "Get the enabling culture on board for all. Breakdown barriers." Continuing, "EDs represent a valuable resource and can help IEEE as a whole. Staff has to take ownership of IEEE culture."

At the other extreme, the Committee heard, "I work for the XYZ Society, not IEEE."

It was of interest to the Committee that the latter comment, though rare, was shared by several other society EDs. However, when these individuals were probed further during the open-ended discussions, it was the case that they, like everyone else we interviewed, were in full compliance with all IEEE (and Technical Activities Department) rules. Strangely, they

denied following the rules even though they, in fact, were. Perhaps they viewed their "outlaw" comments as statements of independence.

If these attitudes were able to stay encapsulated within the particular society staff environment, they could be ignored in the interest of peace and tranquility. Unfortunately, all society staffs interact on a regular basis with the TAD staff, other IEEE staff, and IEEE volunteers who are not the XYZ society volunteers. The disdain and the diffidence with which these interactions are often conducted has created a morale problem which, while not of earth-shaking importance, is palpable and was mentioned often during the interviews.

The Committee feels that, to the extent that these attitudes have come about because of volunteers politicizing the staff, it must stop. Volunteers must remember that while we, volunteers, can and do disagree with each other, these disagreements do not affect our livelihood nor our careers. Involving staff in matters where they should not be involved can jeopardize their job, the jobs of co-workers, the jobs of managers, and, ultimately, undermine all of IEEE. As volunteers, we can say, "I will work very hard for Society XYZ but I will not work for TAB, or Society QSR, or IEEE, ..." For staff members to make the same statement is, simply, unacceptable.

The Committee feels that leadership is required from the President of IEEE and the ExCom to allow the volunteers to see this issue from the staff side and to advise all volunteers to avoid involving staff in Institute politics.

The Committee feels that Dan Senese in his capacity of Executive Director with responsibility for all of the staff, must take the leadership role in this regard as a convener of dialogues whereby those issues that are potentially divisive, no matter how trivial they may appear, can be discussed and settled. Allowing them to fester gives the appearance of rewarding aberrant behaviors and can lead to more serious, and possibly more refractory, problems later.

This is another instance in which the existence of the Committee and the interviews we conducted were salubrious in bringing some of these issues out. It seems that although everyone seemed to sense that there were problems, no one wanted to talk about them.

#### Managing Directors and Staff Executives

The Committee interviewed the Head of Human Resources, Managing Directors of the Standards Board, Technical Activities Department and the U.S. Activities Department as well as the Staff Executives of Publications and Financial Affairs. The Committee found that these individuals have a high degree of "buy-in" to the IEEE culture and, in every case, offered examples of times when they had pitched in to help other entities within IEEE. It was not that these people were any more responsive to IEEE needs than the society EDs

that distinguished their comments in the mind of the Committee, it is that they were proud of their role as corporate citizens of IEEE.

As the U.S. Activities Board evolves into IEEE USA, it is hoped that the increased autonomy of the new group not lead to an alienation of the staff culture that exists today. This concern is made manifest by the geographical separation which can lead to cultural separation.

### Recommendations

#### 1. Leave the present IEEE Bylaws with respect to staff alone

According to the IEEE Bylaws

The Executive Director of the IEEE shall be the chief operating officer of the IEEE, shall be in charge of IEEE, its staff and operations, and shall be the custodian of all property and equipment owned and used by the IEEE, for which he/she shall be responsible to the Executive Committee.

The Committee feels that the quoted paragraph contains all that is needed to provide the ExCom and the Board of Directors with assurance that their fiduciary responsibilities can be met with the authority vested in the Executive Director.

#### 2. Increase communication and dialogues among staff

The Committee feels that no matter what issues or problems arise, they can be best solved with increased dialogue among all of the stakeholders. The Committee feels that the Executive Director should be the convener of these dialogues and that all participants should approach them in a collegial way. In some cases, it will be appropriate for elements of the volunteer leadership to participate in the dialogues because they are stakeholders as well.

#### 3. Entity autonomy will and should continue

One of the major principles to result from the strategic planning process in which the IEEE has been engaged for the last 5-years is to empower IEEE entities to conduct their business with dispatch. New bylaws for some of these entities were drafted and approved by the IEEE Board of Directors to ensure that this took place. However, empowerment does not mean that the IEEE Board of Directors divests itself of its fiduciary responsibilities. For the sake of expedience, some of these responsibilities, including the hiring of the

Executive Director, are delegated to the Executive Committee, but of course, the ultimate responsibility for IEEE is that of the Board of Directors.

Within this context and in accordance with the IEEE Bylaw quoted above, the Executive Committee hires an Executive Director and vests in that person the responsibility, and the authority, to run IEEE. The Executive Director is responsible to the Executive Committee, and the rest of the staff of IEEE is responsible to the Executive Director. Stating this fact in no way diminishes the move toward entity autonomy, and the Executive Director must be aware that his staff responsibilities can best be accomplished in a collegial environment.

#### 4. Directions for the Executive Director come from the IEEE President

The President of IEEE is, under the IEEE Bylaws, the Chief Executive Officer of IEEE, and the Executive Director is the Chief Operating Officer of IEEE. The President, therefore, has a bridging role between the volunteer structure and the staff structure. It is the President that should advise the Executive Director about when or when not to involve volunteers in what could-be considered staff-only situations. It is expected that the more serious issues would be discussed by the 3Ps + Group and by the ExCom, and that these - groups will support the Executive Director in his actions that result from a consensus of these groups.

The present Executive Director, hired in 1995 with no prior IEEE experience, is confronted with many society EDs and other managers with decades of experience and an IEEE culture which is leading toward increased autonomy for all entities. It is inevitable that there would be some insecurity in treading into areas that might be political minefields. Two thoughts come to mind. One is that when the health and welfare of the IEEE is involved, the Executive Director, with the knowledge and backing of the President and the ExCom, should not, and must not, hesitate to act. The IEEE Constitution, Bylaws, and the Not-for-profit Laws of the State of NY demand nothing less. But in other matters, particularly those of perception, there must be a profound tolerance for ambiguity to avoid senseless fights over nothing.

#### 5. While encouraging the move towards entity autonomy, there is only one staff of IEEE

In a well-run organization all staff are cross-trained so, if necessary, they can pitch in for one another. Cross-training staff leads to efficiencies which save money, empower employees to affect a broader segment of IEEE, increase morale of all, and allow staff to move seamlessly from one department or group to another. Staff that can make a career in IEEE are more valuable employees than those who feel that they can work only for the entity that they are now in. Several people the Committee interviewed stated dearly that they intended to make a career within IEEE and welcomed the

opportunity to participate in Quality Teams and inter-department committees because they felt that this broadening would make them more promotable.

It is in this context that the Committee has reacted so negatively to the perceived polarization of staff in favor of their present entity and against "the IEEE." If the staff is to remain glued together as one corporate entity, the Executive Director is the "glue" which will hold the staff together. In the past this has been done well and not so well by the various Executive Directors (General Manager- in earlier times). It is incumbent on the present Executive Director to assure himself that there is general buy-in to the "we are all employees of one IEEE" unifying theme for staff.

## Conclusions

The Committee members have learned a great deal about areas of the IEEE that even the most experienced of us had not encountered before. On the one hand, there was and is visible relief that the Committee did not uncover anything which cannot be handled within existing structures. On the other hand, some members of the Committee are puzzled by the intense counter-reaction to the Committee's activities including flurries of e-mails protesting Committee's actions when in fact no actions had been taken. Indeed, it is, as if, some members of the IEEE community have staked out areas into which they feel that no inquiry is permissible even by the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors. The biggest problem the Committee encountered was that there were expressions of paranoia from some parts of the IEEE that were intense and, at times, personal, even while the Committee was finding out that IEEE was in-good shape and the Committee's recommendations would be essentially benign. Perhaps the only problems at IEEE in 1997 are such a complete lack of trust in ourselves that we see demons where there are none, and problems where there are none.

One member of the Committee recalled for us the part of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle which states that any measurement of a system perturbs the system itself. The fact that the Committee was formed, carried on its interviews, had long and deliberate discussion sessions, and has now submitted its Final Report has changed IEEE in palpable ways. Discussions were held on topics that were previously considered forbidden; some who thought they were operating outside the system were shown to be well within the system; silly behaviors were regarded as silly even by putative allies; and admirable behaviors were regarded as admirable even by putative enemies. Better communications have, in fact, begun in IEEE as a result of the Committee's existence, and it is one of our recommendations that the improved communications continue.

Another member of the Committee shared with us Heisenberg's Certainty Principle which states that if you try to be everywhere, your momentum will be zero. The Committee's Final Report should not be viewed as "being everywhere" and having no focus. The Committee took this as an adjuration to be sure that the IEEE community realized that, as a result of the Committee's existence, discussions, recommendations, and hoped for follow-up by the ExCom and President, IEEE has crossed a threshold and will be a different organization in the future.

It is up to all of us to make sure that it is a better organization.