

AGING AND ADMINISTRATION IN ACADEMIC PSYCHOLOGISTS

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A positive relation between age and volume of administrative responsibility was found in a sample of 96 academic psychologists who had held faculty appointments for 1 to 23 years. In cross-sectional analyses, age correlated positively with number of committee seats occupied (weighted according to importance), with an average $r = .33$. A trend analysis showed a significant linear increase in administrative responsibility over time.

As individuals age, their occupational performance changes (Lehman, 1953). For example, the publication rate of university professors increases until their early 40s and thereafter decreases (Dennis, 1956; Horner, Rushton, & Vernon, 1986). Teaching effectiveness as rated by students also shows a decline with age (Horner, Murray, & Rushton, 1989).

An additional responsibility shared by individuals with academic careers is that of administration. Using a retrospective design, Zuckerman and Merton (1972) found that six birth cohorts of scientists estimated spending an increasing amount of time in administrative duties in successive periods of their careers. More recently, a longitudinal study found that the proportion of time spent in administration by 545 biochemists more than doubled in the time that intervened between earning their Ph.D. and nine years later (Long & McGinnis, 1981). This paper reports a preliminary investigation of change in administrative duties with age in academic psychologists. We predicted a positive relation between age and amount of administrative responsibility.

METHOD

The number of committee seats occupied by 96 full-time university faculty holding appointments in the Department of Psychology at the University of

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Western Ontario was counted for the period 1966 to 1989. This was carried out by examining each professor's self-completed annual report submitted to the department and bound into an archival document. Committees and professional positions were coded with respect to the amount of time and responsibility normally required. Values ranged from 1 (very little responsibility) to 5 (major responsibility). For example, the elected chair of a department, faculty, university-wide, or community committee was scored '2' while a general membership was scored '1'. A department chair or assistant dean was coded '5'. Each faculty member was assigned a total score for each year ranging from 0 to 35.

The number of years each faculty member served as a subject depended on their age and length of time in the department. Age was obtained from the APA Membership register (American Psychological Association, 1985) and from departmental records. Thus, a member of faculty who was aged 30 in 1967 and who remained in the department until 1989 would be followed to age 53. A faculty member who began the study in 1967 at age 55 would be included until 1976 when age 65 was reached. The interrater reliability of coding based on two raters for a random subsample of 24 faculty over one academic year was .93. Analyses were collapsed across sex because of the small number of women.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In cross-sectional analyses, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed between age and administration scores within each measurement year from 1967 to 1989. All coefficients were positive, ranging from .09 to .54, with a mean Fisher z-transformed $r = .33$ ($p < .05$). A semi-longitudinal analysis was also performed. As age increased in 8 five-year steps from 30 to 65, the mean

TABLE 1
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES OF ACADEMIC PSYCHOLOGISTS
AND THEIR AGE

| Age | n | Mean | S.D. |
|-----|----|------|------|
| 30 | 38 | 2.76 | 2.34 |
| 35 | 52 | 5.23 | 3.90 |
| 40 | 34 | 6.24 | 7.76 |
| 45 | 29 | 5.48 | 5.54 |
| 50 | 18 | 6.50 | 5.11 |
| 55 | 11 | 8.82 | 5.47 |
| 60 | 4 | 8.25 | 5.48 |
| 65 | 2 | 8.50 | 4.95 |

administration scores increased: 2.76, 5.23, 6.24, 5.48, 6.50, 8.82, 8.25, and 8.50, producing a significant linear trend ($F = 5.21, p < .05$) (Table 1).

In summary, the data indicate that as academic psychologists age, they appear to have greater administrative responsibility. Two age plateaus are suggested for administrative duties, one in the middle years (35 to 45) and a second starting at age 55. It is possible that the first represents a level of administration which is in harmony with other academic duties characteristic of that career stage. The second plateau may be accounted for by a role change in which academics alter their focus from research and teaching to administration as was found by Zuckerman and Merton (1972). These results are unlikely to be cohort effects because the subjects were a variety of ages at the study's outset thus may have had differing career influences at any given age. Shin and Putnam (1982) have suggested that the more prominent the administrative position in academia, generally the broader are its associated responsibilities and thus, the longer the necessary socialization period.

It must be acknowledged that the measure of administrative responsibility used in this study is only a rough approximation of the actual amount of time and effort invested in administrative work. First, there may be individual differences in the actual amount of time and energy devoted to a task coded at any given level. The degree of personally-motivated time commitment, however, was not expected to covary with age. Second, the mere reporting of administrative activities may be less than accurate, although any possible reporting bias was also not expected to be systematically related to age.

Age is used here as an approximate length of time since Ph.D. There is much variability, however, in the age at which the Ph.D. is completed and the age of appointment. Variable too is the length of appointment within the time span of the study. Any or all of these factors may have inadvertently influenced our results in some unknown manner.

Included in the estimate of administrative duties were positions held on scientific committees. These appointments are awarded to a small number of psychologists who produce a large quantity of superior research. Therefore, to the extent that a negative relation exists between research productivity and administrative duties, this association may be artificially suppressed by the potential confound of the inclusion of scientific committee appointments.

Although there is evidence that administrative responsibility increases with age, the measure of administrative duties and the small sample size make these results suggestive only and in need of further testing. Moreover, a smaller number of subjects in our study assumed administrative duties at ages 60 and 65. Have the small number of individuals assumed a high degree of administrative responsibility at an older age, or have they held relatively

influential administrative positions for a major portion of their career? For example, some individuals may initially divide time more evenly among research, teaching, and service, increasing the energy devoted to service as research resources are reduced and productivity declines (Long & McGinnis, 1982; Zuckerman & Merton, 1972). In contrast, little role change may occur with age for other academics. Just as productive scholars may continue predominantly in research throughout their career, other individuals may begin their career with a relatively high degree of administrative responsibility, maintaining a stable level through the middle and older years. Future research may be able to determine the individual differences in the relation of administrative duties with age.

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