

## Letters to the Editor

### A Proposal on ACM Organization

Dear Editor:

Several ACM Members have suggested to me that the attached memorandum, originally offered to the ACM Council as an informal proposal and since, to the Commission of Thoughtful Persons for their consideration, be offered to the Letters section of communications, to make it available for the scrutiny of the ACM membership.

Jack Moshman has remarked to me that the kind of organizational structure suggested here calls to mind of that of The American Statistical Association, and that it seems to work well for that organization.

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To: ACM Council Members  
From: H. S. Bright, ACM Member  
Subject: ACM Organization

In a separate document,\* acting as a member of the Council, I have proposed for Council consideration a resolution that would call for appointment of a Commission of Thoughtful Persons to examine the functions and structure of the Association for Computing Machinery and its relations with its members and with the computing community.

If the resolution is adopted, the Commission will have a large job; I am not prepared to predict what conclusions it might reach on the major questions of the purposes and posture the Association should assume.

As to the working structure of the Association, however, I predict that such a Commission might reach the conclusions that it is time for a general overhaul and that a suitable structure is not difficult to design from the groups and relationships that have evolved over the past decade. I attach an outline that might serve as a point of departure for designing an orderly structure for the ACM.

Those who have worked in the ACM are aware of certain weaknesses of our patchwork organization; I offer a few examples.

The Council has both executive and legislative responsibilities; it is too large and meets too seldom to permit it to manage well, and it is too far removed from individual members to permit it to represent them effectively. A purely legislative Council could be larger in size and could function better while meeting less often, if backed up by a smaller legislative body meeting more often and by an effective executive organization.

The Chapters are not sufficiently well wired into the management of the Association. Numerous members of the Association, both those active in (inter) national affairs and those primarily

\* Resolution to ACM Council 11/15/63, for appointment of a Commission of Thoughtful Persons, *Comm. ACM 7, 5* (May 1964), 316.

concerned with local Chapter affairs, have spoken to me about the need to bring the Chapters and the National into a closer working relationship.

In the proposed organization structure, there is a bicameral legislative branch. Ultimate legislative responsibility resides largely in a Council, comprised of Representatives-at-Large elected by the entire membership of the Association, together with an elected Representative of each Chapter. The Council would meet only once per year; this frequency of meeting would be adequate for exercise of the major functions reserved to the Council, and would (unlike our present three-per-year frequency) permit consistent attendance by the entire Council.

*Proposed Organization of Association for Computing Machinery*

#### EXECUTIVE

*Officers* (Elected by entire Membership of Association)  
President and Board Chairman  
Vice President and Director of Committee Activities  
Secretary  
Treasurer

#### *Executive Committees*

Editorial Affairs Committee (Chaired by Director of Editorial Affairs; Members nominated by Director, confirmed by Board); establishes editorial policies, supervises overall conduct of publications.

Chapter Affairs Committee (Chaired by Director of Chapter Affairs; Members nominated by Director, confirmed by Board)

External Affairs Committee (Chaired by Director of External Affairs; comprises President (ex officio) and Members nominated by Director, confirmed by Board)

Financial Affairs Committee (Chaired by Director of Financial Affairs; comprises Treasurer (ex officio) and other Members nominated by Director and confirmed by Board); approves Editorial and Administrative Budgets; recommends Association budget, to be approved by Council; establishes long-range financial plans.

#### LEGISLATIVE

*Council* (Meets annually, chaired by Vice President; comprises Representatives-at-Large elected by entire Association membership, and Chapter Representatives elected by memberships of individual Chapters)

*Board of Directors* (Meets quarterly, chaired by President)

#### *Officers of the Association*

*Director of Editorial Affairs* (Elected by Council)

*Director of Chapter Affairs* (Elected by Council)

*Director of External Affairs* (Elected by Council)

*Director of Financial Affairs* (Elected by Council)

*Past President*

#### OPERATIONAL

*Standing Committees* (Individual committees established or disbanded by Board; for each, officers nominated by Vice President, confirmed by Board; Members appointed by committee officers)

*Ad Hoc Committees* (Established or disbanded, and officers appointed, by President; members appointed by committee officers)

*Special Interest Groups* (Individual SIG's established by petition approved by officers elected by members of each SIG; Association members may apply for membership in individual SIG's)

*Editorial Staff* (Chaired by Director of Editorial Affairs; Editors-in-Chief of Association publications nominated by Director, confirmed by Board; Associate Editors of individual publications nominated by cognizant Editor-in-Chief, confirmed by Editorial Committee; staff employee positions specified by Director of Editorial Activities, authorized by Board)

under editorial budget recommended by Editorial Committee and approved by Finance Committee)

#### ADMINISTRATIVE

*Headquarters Staff* (Reports to Board via Secretary; staff positions specified by Secretary, authorized by Board under administrative budget recommended by Secretary and approved by Finance Committee)

More detailed legislative responsibilities would be vested in a Board of Directors, composed of the Officers (elected by the Association membership); several Directors (elected by the Council); and the immediate Past President. The Board, meeting more often than the proposed Council and being much smaller in size, could perform many jobs more effectively than can the present Council. By requiring that important appointments be confirmed by the Board, the Association can improve the probability that major responsibilities will be carried by people who are willing as well as able to do so. The present committee structure is a patchwork. Some Ad Hoc Committees are apparently more nearly permanent and certainly more important than some Standing Committees. The distinctions in responsibility between Special Interest Committees, Ad Hoc Committees, and Standing Committees are obscure, and some Special Interest Groups seem to be carrying on functions that could be handled better by well-constituted committees. I do not understand any distinctions in purpose that justify our present "Special Interest Committees".

The proposed structure has four major executive responsibilities of the Association vested in the four Executive Committees, and operational responsibilities vested in four kinds of organizations: Standing Committees, Ad Hoc Committees, Special Interest Groups, and the Editorial Staff. The Joint Users' Group, and other groups that may follow it as ties to other technical organizations, might function as well as a Standing Committee or might justify the establishment of a fifth kind of operational organization of the Association.

Each of the four Officers would have one continuing collateral duty in addition to serving as a Member of the Board of Directors. The President and Treasurer would serve ex officio on the External and Financial Affairs Committees, respectively. The Vice President would serve as Director of Committee Activities. The Secretary would serve as Director of the Administrative Staff.

The administrative functions of the Association, now supervised de facto by the Secretary by delegation from the Executive Committee, would report to the Board through the Secretary. Editorial and administrative budgets would be approved separately by the Finance Committee, and the overall budget of the Association, by the Council.

Many possible organizational structures might work well for the Association. The particular combination of responsibilities and authorities described in the attached proposal is merely intended to represent one reasonably coherent and consistent framework for our activities.

HERBERT S. BRIGHT  
Member, ACM

#### Comments on Computers in Banking

Dear Editor:

I enjoyed the provocative article by Roy N. Freed in the December 1963, *Communications*, on legal implications of computers in the banking business. I find a slight taint, however, of an attitude all too common among businessmen—a tendency to minimize the rights of the consumer. Mr. Freed states that, "legislators, banking departments, judges and jurors [may] feel that the new technology represents a substantial bonanza to its users, especially one whose benefits are not shared with customers by means of reduced charges. . . . They [may] feel that

the banks' customers are being subjected to new, unnecessary risks of economic loss in the rush to automate."

Mr. Freed seems to feel that these fears are unfounded or of no consequence. We can already see, however, the failure to pass along the economic benefits. In many banks which have automated their checking accounts, there has been no reduction in service charges. Those patrons who have always used "deluxe" personalized checks are paying at least as much as they used to for the printing of the checks. Since the bank now derives some benefit from the use of these checks, it should share the cost.

The new and unnecessary risks are exemplified by Mr. Freed's statement, "the check inscribed with an account number in MICR becomes . . . the equivalent of a check signed in blank . . . customers will be required . . . to safeguard their own inscribed checks and to notify their banks in the event of loss." Automation must not be allowed to shift any of the burden of preventing forgery from the bank to the customer.

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#### In Defense of the Equivalence Algorithm

Dear Editor:

There are a few small misprints in the diagrams of our paper "An Improved Equivalence Algorithm" [*Comm. ACM* (May, 1964)], which I would like to correct. In Figure 2, the empty space in the third iteration box should contain: " $t = t + 1$ ;" the next box should contain " $R_t = a(E_i)$ " instead of " $R_t = s(E_i)$ ." In the same figure, the formulas for  $H_{t_0}$  and  $H'_{t_0}$  should be:  $H_{t_0} = \max(H_{t_0}, H_t + D)$ ,  $H'_{t_0} = \max(H'_{t_0}, H'_t - D)$ . Finally, in Figure 3, the first decision box should contain " $S_i = i$ " instead of " $S_i = 0$ ."

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#### Comments on Tape Reels

Dear Editor:

The proposed American Standard for Recorded Magnetic Tape for Information Exchange, published in the May issue of the *Communications*, does not include provision for the file protection ring that is often used with the magnetic tape reels. The file protection ring is used to avoid accidental insertion of a write-enable ring. It is important that the measurements for the file protection ring also be standard. The proposed standard should include a diagram such as follows:



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