

Thomas & Associates, Inc.
The State of the Arts: Art Career Inventory™
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

www.artstaffing.com

A Crisis in Arts and Culture Employment?

A recent international study on the career service needs of arts and culture professionals conducted by Thomas & Associates, Inc., has led to some surprising conclusions concerning the state of employee satisfaction in these organizations and resultant levels of commitment to the industry overall. Incorporating the results of Thomas & Associates' Art Career Inventory™ (ACI™), a career needs assessment tool developed by the firm in response to perceived needs in the arts and culture industries for continued leadership training and professional development, the study suggests that the arts and culture world is currently undergoing a crisis in employee satisfaction, professional development and lack of career paths.

“Help! I need a solid plan of action to move away from the [career] trap I find myself in. I am proud of the accomplishments I have made so far, but need help in taking the next steps to a more polished career.”
Gallery Director, MO

Career Levels of Participants

According to the ACI™, of the 283 participating respondents, 37% identified themselves as mid-career level employees with 5–10 years professional work in an arts or culture organization. The next highest percentage, at 30%, had under 5 years experience in the field. Recent graduates accounted for 14%, career changers 12% and executive-level participants were the smallest percentage at 7%. (Figure 1) Of those surveyed, 75% were from museum or other non-profits, with the remaining 25% divided between galleries, auction houses and other commercial arts organizations.

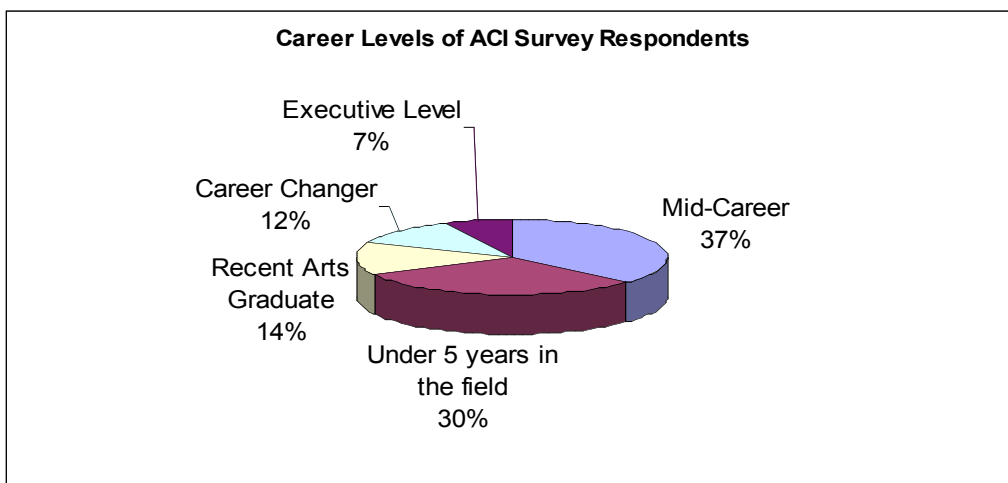


Figure 1

The above ratio in responses suggests that the situation may be more immediately critical at the non-profit level, where salaries and advancement are more limited than in other sectors.

Career Commitment Levels

Fully 77% of those surveyed said they plan to stay in their current position for less than five years, an alarming statistic given the formidable costs and disruption engendered by continual turnover. Even more startling was the fact that, along with career changers, the majority of recent graduates and those with under five years experience both indicated that they were looking to leave their current position in one year or less. (Figure 2)

“If it is a matter of waiting for the right job to open (and I am told that it is), it would be useful to know what a future employer would like to see me have accomplished in the interim.”
- *Freelance Researcher, North Carolina*

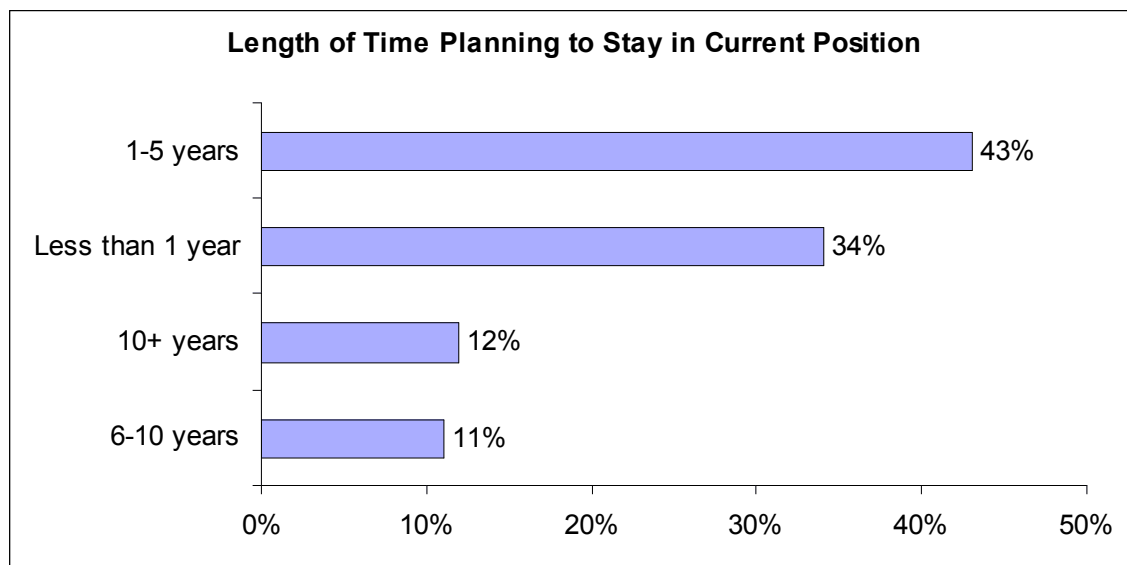


Figure 2

What Would Make a New Job Attractive?

Except at the executive level, the biggest non salary-related issue faced at work was the lack of a career path. This finding may reflect the recognition among executives that they are working at the top of their field and can more easily direct their path to other executive positions. At every level, “developing my own area of expertise” was considered the main reason to consider new employment and mid-career professionals would also leave for a better working environment.

74% of respondents indicated that they wanted more decision-making power and responsibility. Reflecting this, 49% cited a desire to be more empowered along with the chance to develop specific preferred experience and additional skills as the two foremost contributions towards the creation of a desirable work environment. (Figure 3)

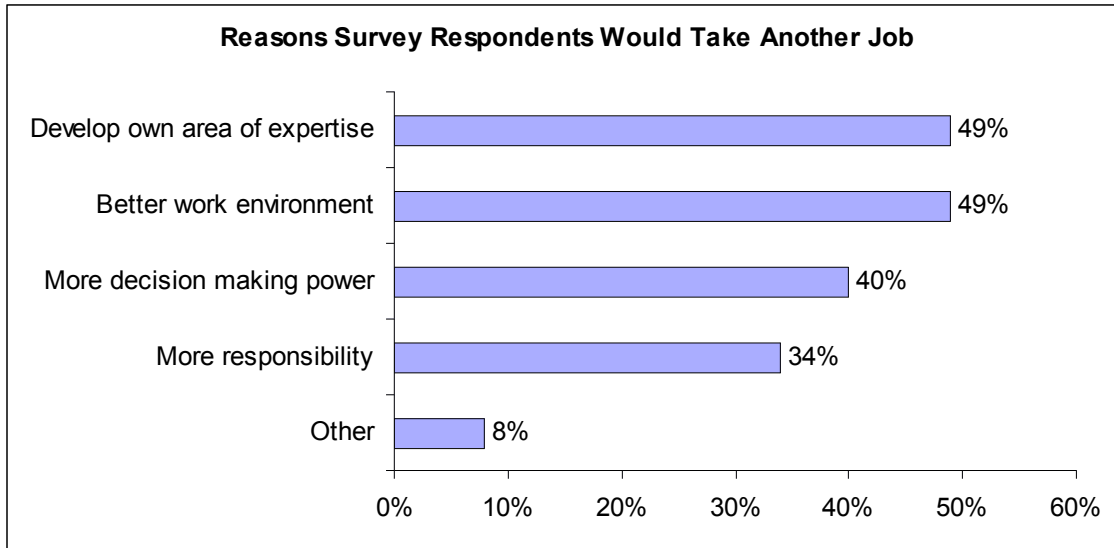


Figure 3

Perceived Career Obstacles

In addition to the lack of a career path, the development of a network of personal contacts was seen as of great importance by a high number of respondents, 44% of whom identified “lack of contacts” as the biggest obstacle to their career development. “Lack of experience” was cited by 21% as a concern, although the least cited work-related challenge was “lack of skills,” which was only selected by 4% of respondents. (Figure 4)

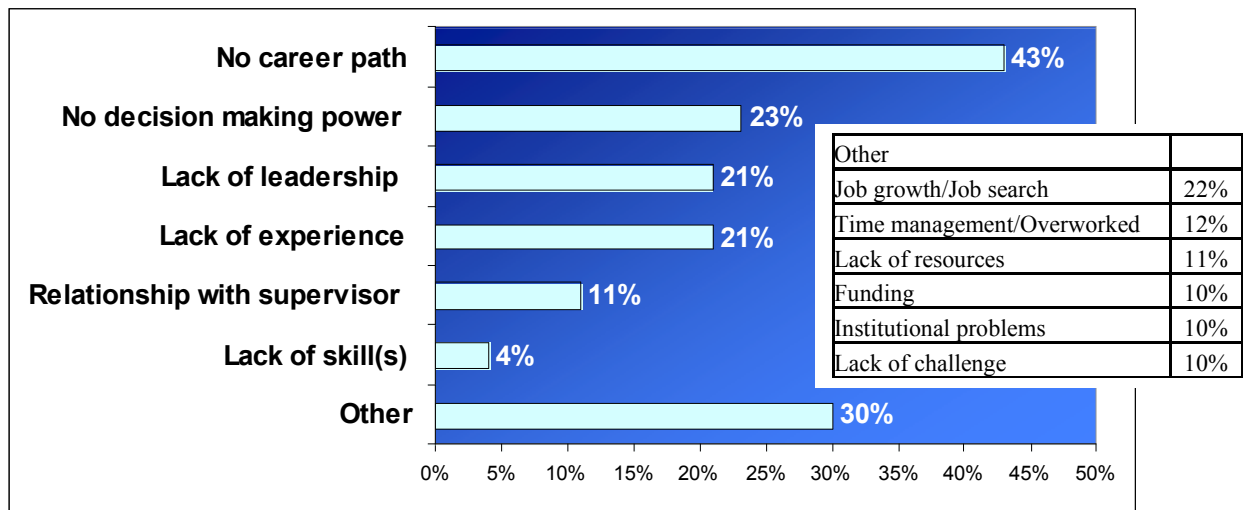


Figure 4

Training Opportunities at Work

Conversely, a startling finding was the fact that fully 69% of respondents said they lacked training opportunities at work—or were not even sure that they existed. This despite the correlating fact that 37% said that they would best be able to address their biggest challenges at work through training. Over 50% of the executive level respondents said they had training available. (Figure 5)

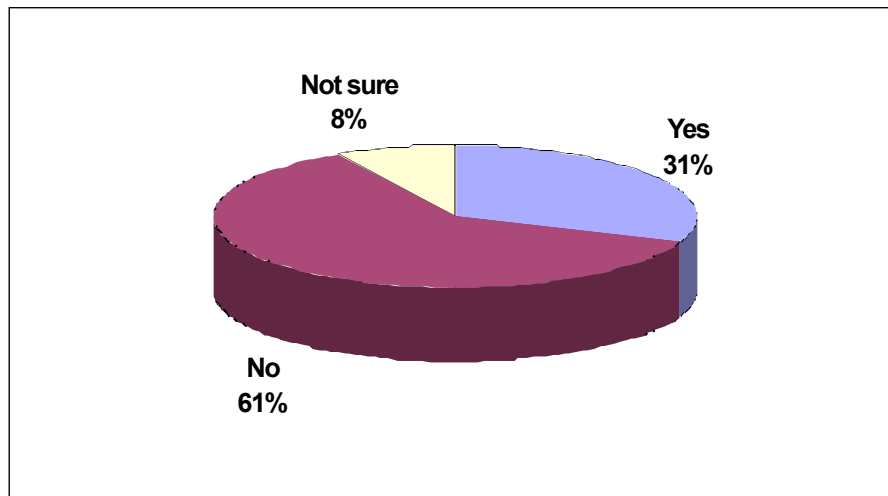


Figure 5

The ACI™ and Other Studies: Supportive Analysis

Findings of the ACI™ were supported by other related recent surveys, including those undertaken by the Museum Association of New York (MANY) and CompassPoint. According to these surveys, 66% of greater NYC area non-profit executive level employees are in an executive position for the first time.* But only 36% of current executives are promoted from within their own non-profit organizations.† This suggests a dramatic imbalance between commitment to any given organization and advancement within the ranks of that organization. Deepening this conundrum is the fact that 65% of the more than 2,200 non-profit organizations surveyed by the Anne E. Casey Foundation in 2004 expected to go through a leadership transition by 2009—and 45% of museums accredited by the American Association of Museums have experienced executive director turnover within the past 3 years. Yet only 9% of New York State museums said their organization had a succession plan. While the last figure itself represents a smaller percentage of the numbers immediately preceding it, such a finding seems nothing short of astonishing.

“It seems that the museum education field is quite rushed with little time for professional development and networking.”
- *Museum Associate, Virginia*

* “Who’s Next? Questioning the Future of Museum Leadership in New York State” Museum Association of New York 2006

† “Daring to Lead 2006 A National Study of Nonprofit executive Leadership” CompassPoint NonProfit Services

Conclusions and Recommendations

Clearly, employee needs concerning long-term commitment issues and career building at every level of experience will seriously need to be addressed to prevent the field from losing many of its most talented to more immediately rewarding opportunities. Career development services, short-term current skill needs and long-term employment initiatives are essential to the creation and maintenance of a stable, rewarding and productive work environment that can and will continue to attract and retain gifted and qualified professionals and pay back social, aesthetic and economic dividends for both arts and culture organizations and the public they serve. Based on the ACI™ findings, the following recommendations may be made:

- The industry must value and support itself. Organizations should hire, train and promote from within and from the field in order to build a healthy and dynamic workforce.
- Arts and culture organizations must develop clear career paths for current employees and those entering the field in order to ensure a committed and talented workforce.
- Training and professional development opportunities must be made available.
- Personal coaching and learning projects – opportunities for employees to build skills outside of their job descriptions -- are also needed.
- Organizations need to decide where they want to invest their money: in the cost of training and retaining current employees or continually finding new ones.

“I think there is room to advise and nurture mid career art professionals like myself who find themselves out of the loop.... We are often isolated doing independent projects, and our vast experience and insider knowledge not fully utilized.”
- *Independent Curator and Advisor, London*

Comprehensive Report

The complete ACI™ results show more detailed information concerning the specific needs of participants and their ideas for productive change. Contact Thomas & Associates, Inc., at (contact info here) for a complete copy of the ACI™.

Methodology

The ACI™ is a career needs assessment tool developed by Thomas & Associates, Inc. The ACI™ consists of an online survey linked to 600 subscribers through www.artstaffing.com; national and international museum list-serves; museum and arts and culture associations; and *The Art Newspaper*. The survey was open from November 7 through December 12, 2006. All responses were kept confidential. The opportunity to win a \$200 career consultation was given as a participation incentive, with the three winners notified December 13, 2006. Questions asked were related to demographic

information; current position, organization and career level; identification of skills that required improvement; the biggest challenges faced at work; position desired and perceived obstacles to obtaining that position; and an open comment section where participants were encouraged to provide opinions, ideas and details on related issues.

About Thomas & Associates, Inc.

Based in New York City, Thomas & Associates, Inc. is an innovative firm that offers staffing, consulting and training programs for museums, non-profit organizations, and arts and culture businesses nationwide. The company has recently launched a career services division to address the needs of arts and culture professionals everywhere.

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