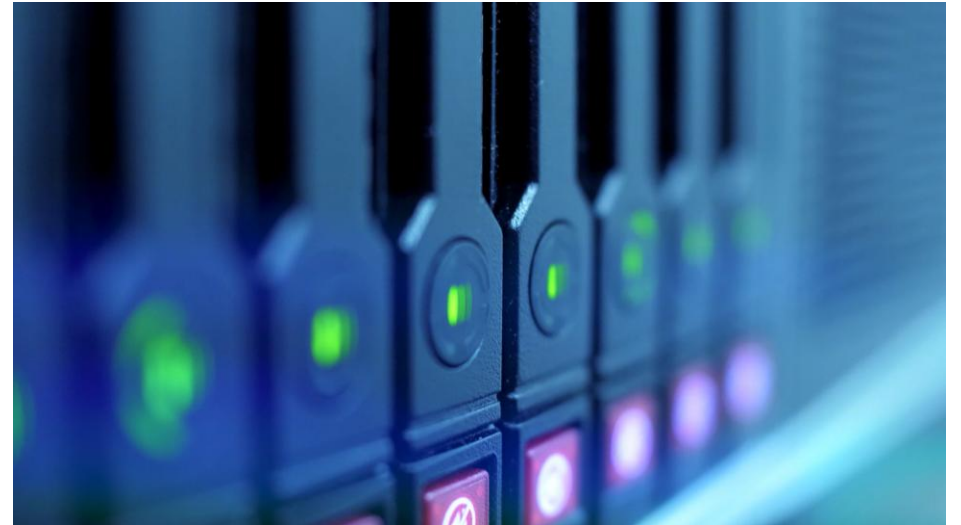

Common Challenges Faced by New Digital Preservation Practitioners: Preliminary Findings

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Background & Terminology

Institute for Research Design in
Librarianship (IRDL) project

Project born out of personal experience as
a new practitioner & a survey I conducted

- Were other new people experiencing the same things as me?

“New” vs. “Early-Career”

Research Questions

What common job challenges are identified by digital preservation practitioners new to the field?

What strategies do experienced digital preservation practitioners employ to overcome those common job challenges?

Research Goals

- Help future and new practitioners understand what challenges they may face and how to navigate them
- Help supervisors of new practitioners better support their employees
- Help digital preservation professors and instructors understand what challenges their students will face and better prepare them to navigate those challenges

Literature Review

- Literature on practitioner experiences is extremely limited
 - 1 notable study focusing on practitioner experiences
 - Blumenthal, K.-R., Griesinger, P., Kim, J. Y., Peltzman, S., & Steeves, V. (2020). What's Wrong with Digital Stewardship: Evaluating the Organization of Digital Preservation Programs from Practitioners' Perspectives. *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*, 7(1). <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol7/iss1/13>
- NDSA Surveys; Blumenthal et al. (2020) suggest new practitioners are in the minority of the field

Methodology

- Observational Design
- 4-stage Qualitative Study
 1. In-depth interviews with new practitioners via Zoom (Round 1)
 2. Preliminary thematic analysis to identify common challenges
 3. In-depths interviews with experienced practitioners via Zoom to get advice in navigating the challenges (Round 2)
 4. Full data analysis
- Participants recruited via listserv announcements
 - Round 1: 0-3 years of experience
 - Round 2: 6+ years of experience

Round 1

Participant Demographics

13 participants

Average experience in the field: 1.875 years

Types of Organizations:

- Academic libraries
 - Medical libraries
 - Public libraries
 - Government organizations
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Round 1 Questions

1. Please tell me how you got into digital preservation work.
2. Please give me an overview of your job duties.
3. What does a typical workday look like for you?
4. How settled into your role do you feel?
5. Regarding your digital preservation work, can you describe a recent moment where you felt challenged?
6. Is there something that is a recurring challenge for you?
7. What is the biggest challenge you've faced so far?
8. Are there other people at your institution that either do digital preservation work or have knowledge of digital preservation work?
9. When you encounter a challenge, where do you go for help to overcome it?
10. Given the challenges you've encountered so far, do you feel you have enough support at your institution to overcome them?
11. Do you have a network of support for your work outside of your institution, such as a community of practice?

Findings - Challenges

Organizational / Bureaucratic Challenges

Challenge	Advocacy While New
Explanation	Practitioners must heavily advocate for their work while still orienting themselves in the field, which in turn makes effectively advocating more challenging.
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “You need to know what you're asking for, and you need to know how to ask for it.”• “When I go into those meetings, sometimes it's super positive and super supportive and sometimes it's like the Spanish Inquisition.”

Organizational / Bureaucratic Challenges

Challenge	Funding
Explanation	Practitioners face obstacles in acquiring funding for digital preservation needs, <u>regardless</u> of organization support.
Quotes	“I gave them a budget. They didn't like the kind of budget I gave them. I tried to get a more clear idea of what they wanted. And then one of the lines of my budget was our working storage, our AWS instance so we could store the digitization files before we process them into storage. And the director said, I just don't understand why we need working storage. And I was like, we have all these books why do we need a building? I was like, I don't even know how to answer that.”

Organizational / Bureaucratic Challenges

Challenge	Explaining the Work (Again and again)
Explanation	Practitioners often must explain their work repeatedly to colleagues across the institution due to a lack of knowledge or understanding.
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “The thing that makes the bureaucratic things more complicated, other than just normal bureaucratic stuff is, is that kind of lack of understanding, and having to become a communicator about something that you're only really trying to figure out yourself.”<li>• “Digital preservation is such a weird thing because it's like in the middle of the Venn diagram of humanities and IT and like you're constantly having to change your narrative to both of them to get them to understand.”

Technical Challenges

Challenge	IT Department Roadblocks
Explanation	Practitioners often struggle with IT departments in communicating digital preservation needs and getting the support they need for technical initiatives.
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “We've been trying to get Bit Curator installed on my colleague's machine for over a year now, and Lord knows that would help us a lot even though I don't know for sure because I can't use it to find out...Our campus library doesn't do virtualization, which astounds me because the entire world is run on virtual machines...that's just what we've inherited from Central IT.<li>• “IT couldn't know less of what we do, even though they're in the libraries.”

Technical Challenges

Challenge	Not Prepared for Technical Work by MLIS Program
Explanation	Practitioners with MLIS degrees felt that their graduate coursework did not adequately prepare them for the technical aspects of the work.
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “We went over a lot of theoretical considerations, but there wasn't really any practical teachings, like we weren't taught how to scan for viruses. We weren't taught the different programs to open files. It was nothing really practical, because I think they were assuming that we would kind of deal with those issues as we encountered them, and I think they were also assuming that repositories might have a workflow or a system already set up in place, that we would just learn.”

Technical Challenges

Challenge	High Learning Curve
Explanation	Practitioners faced a steep learning curve when it came to the technical work required for digital preservation.
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “The learning curve in general was fairly high because I haven't had a lot of training.”<li>• “I did not come from a tech background so I started to learn the basics of computer science, networking, and coding, and everything like that has been something I didn't know yet, so I've been having to learn all of that which it slows us down.”

Personal Challenges

Challenge	Working in Isolation
Explanation	Practitioners are often the sole digital preservation person at their institution and lack a sense of digital preservation community.
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “I think like a lot of digital preservation is pretty isolated from other practitioners. I'm one of three digital preservationists in the state, and none of them are in our region. So when I encounter a weird problem, I don't have anybody to ask.”<li>• “The biggest recurring challenge is the isolation of the role.”

Personal Challenges

Challenge	Imposter Syndrome
Explanation	Practitioners often feel a sense of imposter syndrome and have a fear messing up.
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I am very scared a lot of the time that I'm just going to mess something up.”• “I feel like I still don't really know what to do.”• “I'm too nervous. I feel like listservs are like too public for me. Because you're putting your name and you're like institutional affiliation out into the ether which seems really vulnerable.”

Round 2 Participant Demographics

6 participants

Average experience in the field: 13
years

Types of Organizations:

- Academic libraries

Research- Mediated Mentorship

*Hope that advice from experienced practitioners acts as
“mentorship”*

Next Steps

Full data analysis

- Any other interesting findings?

Write a paper on the findings and publish it

Future research:

- Dive deeper into practitioner isolation
 - Sociocultural lens?
 - Race & Gender
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Thank you!

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