

Evolving Needs for Evolving Libraries

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Abstract:

Quite a bit of literature over the last several years has served as a forum for discussion with regard to the changing role of librarians. These changes are occurring over revamped needs of library users from several different areas, such as: how data is gathered, interpreted and stored, how technology allows users to access surface layers of information, and how libraries play a different role in the physical manifestation of creating knowledge. These become considerations for the level of expertise or talent needed by library organizations of the future. This forum discusses how the impact of these evolving changes should create a need for developing a strategy for future hiring. These considerations come from a recent monograph by this author, *Strategic Human Resource Planning for Academic Libraries*, July 2015, Chandos Publishing, ISBN# 978-1-84334-764-4.

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Article:

Professional development programs for existing librarians are meant to provide supplemental educational opportunities to support broadening skills and abilities and maintain relevance to user groups who think beyond traditional venues of information usage. Library schools are under pressure to re-think curricula for a new generation of librarians. Library and information science educational programs are undergoing a transition in order to strategically align the professional education required in libraries, academic and research libraries in particular, to changing employment needs. This also influenced changes to the standards of accreditation from the American Library Association. These revised standards for accreditation update many of the core elements and needed competencies in a changing professional field. Developing the talent needed for librarians to interact and compete in the future will require a strategic look at knowledge, skills and abilities of both incumbent and yet to be hired librarians.

This creates a need for strategic focus on how to approach hiring into positions when technology, processes and user expectations have evolved. Learning and understanding how personal and organizational flexibility can drive and accommodate these changes becomes an important skill, not typically addressed in Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) programs. As academic librarians become more specialized, the knowledge and skills required could very well

belong to other disciplines and should be considerations in seeking out the needed talent. As trends emerge within the work environment requiring new skills, human resource requirements change as well to seek new talent in order to meet those needs.

Changes within academic library environments are not new. The changing nature of the work performed in academic libraries has been documented in the literature over the years and in some cases matched to job advertisements as the comparison criteria. Behavioral skills have also been a consideration, especially in recognition of how technology can influence human relationships. The value of using good judgment is becoming a stronger consideration due to more analytical and evidence-based assessment for decision making.

Users' expectations for library resources in academic environments are transitioning from collections based needs to needs centered on services or instruction. In some cases, population demographics are changing to reflect a stronger focus on vocational education related to available jobs, which creates a decline in support for four-year liberal arts educational opportunities. The professional literature has many examples, case studies and stories of how change has impacted academic libraries and how changes can be different, in different institutions, based on priorities and values placed on resources and services by library staffs and their academic counterparts.

Since all of these changes, emerging or futurist, involve humans, formulating and adapting strategy becomes a much humanized approach. One of the more popular collective pieces written, speculating on changes and trends to the academic library, was from the ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee in 2014. This group continually analyzes trends within the profession, higher education and the broader environment in order to project and provide data and information for discussion to the larger professional body. These trends include changes to resources, technology and service models, as well as, overall understanding and perception of the libraries' place in a new higher education environment. One of the trends identified in this report related directly to staffing and the need to strategically approach hiring, training or repurposing staff for a new environment, focused on new technologies, enhanced user expectations and new challenges to curating scholarly works.

Brian Matthews, from Virginia Tech, in presenting his views on the future, regarding the shifts in library jobs, describes this shift as always being on the lookout for opportunities to serve changing needs related to teaching, learning, service and research. He expects the future to be ever changing and learning how to anticipate those future needs will better empower the profession to be sustainable. The emerging trends of change are not only happening in academic libraries or institutions of higher education but also globally across the world. These changes and trends are paraphrased as follows:

- Demographics, the developed world has an aging workforce compared to newly emerging parts of the world that have a much younger population
- Large scale unemployment or underemployment can lead to political and social unrest
- Continued growth of diversity in the workplace
- Higher education standards are becoming disconnected to the skills needed by employers
- Jobs are expanding in the services sector but declining in agricultural and industrial areas
- Work is becoming more mobile which broadens availability of talent

- Automation will erode the need for lower skilled workers while specialization will increase the need for higher skills, thus leaving the middle diminished
- Wages will not keep pace with economic growth

New jobs, with new titles, and new skills and abilities are needed to move the organization forward as universities adapt to continuous changes in delivering education. Academic libraries, likewise, must adjust to these changes by strategically recognizing the need to change what library staff do and what functions they perform. Anecdotally there is an increase in the number of new and unique job titles related to emerging technologies, such as: data assets manager, digital initiatives librarian, and digital curator. Other unique titles that appeared are: market insights analyst, repository librarian/manager, and impact evaluation specialist.

Changes within the information and library science profession have required professional positions to have a convergence of skills that can better enable a more complex, dynamic and expanding role within the home institution. This includes combining specialized areas of traditional functions, including the cultural heritage positions with roles in libraries, archives and museums. Other considerations are:

- Trends in LIS programs that recognize and address the impact of these changes in the earlier stages of development, during the education process.
- How post education human resource models are changing to reflect a new professional identity for librarians in whom hard skills are merged with the intelligence to utilize those skills in different ways, based on current organizational needs.
- And an expectation of how these skills need to have a practical approach and perspective, as demonstrated through the problem solving side of applying theoretical knowledge. Research work has been conducted that demonstrates a new internship model, tested over the past four years, that helps a student shape their professional identity for selected areas of librarianship, including work in a library archives.

As emerging trends with technology move in, traditional concepts must be changed and adapted. An example could be archiving born-digital content, which indicates that traditional forms of the content are no longer in demand. Many advocate for collaboration within the community for software and equipment needed to preserve and protect content in multiple formats. The same could be true for the skills needed to work with multiple formats of material. In this case, a convergence of skills is needed in order to not leave gaps that could lose content.

These trends demonstrate the need for competencies that go broader than traditional librarian competencies and skills. The lines are still flexible as to professional responsibilities related to participation and responsibilities for scholarly output. These initiatives to support teaching and learning are successful but lack resources. Being aware of strategic opportunities throughout the organization will lead to strategic planning through innovation. Continuous strategic planning requires an innovation component that provides opportunity for the entire organization to participate.

It's agreed that change in this profession and within academic libraries is constant. So how do you plan for change as change is occurring? Many methods or factors can be taken into account

and in most cases library leaders use multiple approaches to planning for change. It is recommended that directors and deans look within the details of three specific categories, demographics, human capital and the variables of the library organization, when planning for strategic change.

With this constant change come opportunities for new initiatives and actions. Sometimes those opportunities are smaller in scope or limited in timing, such as grant activities or special collection projects. Sometimes it might be necessary to create time-limited staffing situations to bring into the organization specific skills needed or extra talent for a limited duration of time. This can also be a strategic decision and have multiple benefits, such as testing a concept or training staff for future similar initiatives.

Academic libraries are in a position of not only learning and creating knowledge to identify its strategic directions, but also to influence knowledge within the larger campus or university environment for strategic considerations on a larger scale. Organizational learning and thus the complexity and diversity by which it's fostered, can influence the organization's ability to be innovative and respond to unknown elements that result in scholarly and creative activities. This becomes part of a strategic leadership vision for the organization, recognizing evolving needs in order to strategically prepare for the future.

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His published works includes; articles available from UNCG's institutional repository: <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/clist.aspx?id=1946> , and monographs; "*Handbook for Community College Librarians*", Library Unlimited, 2013, and *Strategic Human Resource Planning for Academic Libraries*, Chandos Publishing, 2015.

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