

Rankism and Marginalization in Academic Libraries

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Abstract:

“When people are seeking help in your library, YOU are a librarian,” shared Lori Special, former youth services consultant for the State Library of North Carolina and current University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) library and information science (LIS) lecturer.¹ The average library user does not see rank or title or affiliation; they see someone who can assist them, solve a problem, or provide a service. Yet, in many academic libraries, there are many levels of employees, even within a class, like students. There are also many categories of library workers—with titles and rights and responsibilities reflective of the overall academic culture in which they are placed. This stratification leads to much debate, discussion, and potential division within academic libraries. Libraries are entities that have been built upon classification and categorization, and these have been applied to internal human resources, as well as collections. These library or campus-designed classifications may promote rankism and employee marginalization.

In the first section of this chapter, terminology, background, and context about these concepts will be explained. The overarching themes of rankism and marginalization will be explored next, followed by a discussion about empowering employees and valuing the dignity and engagement of all library workers. The related concepts of underemployment and role migration as well as retraining and career progression will be discussed in the following section. This chapter concludes with recommended areas for further research and a discussion regarding nomenclature, employee engagement, and employee value.

Keywords: rankism | marginalization | academic libraries

Article:

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Terminology, background, and context

All employees are integral to the operation of the library and the services it provides; however, the contributions of those designated faculty and staff members are not always equally valued. As mentioned in the opening section, how individuals are classified as either faculty or staff employees depends on the institution they serve. It is important to point out that specifically in academic libraries, an individual could be considered tenure-track faculty at one institution, an academic professional with continuous appointment at another university, or simply staff at a third college without any change to their duties, master of library and information science (MLIS) degree status, or previous experience.

Surprisingly, even though libraries are designed to facilitate the finding, classification, and dissemination of information, unlike other parts of academia, there is a dearth of standardization of positions, resulting in a variety of stratification and hierarchy within libraries. As stated previously, this hierarchy is likely dependent upon the type of institution and the library's own place in the overall institutional hierarchy.

At times, the differences in how faculty and staff are treated within those ranks and from administration are quite subtle and may be insignificant. For example, it may be as simple as some individuals being recognized with their name and title and others relegated to use of their name and department. Another such example is the use of information as power through information banking- the subjective selection as to who receives communications or who has access to certain information. While we respect the importance of protecting our users' and colleagues' right to privacy, this type of information filtering is antithetical to our ethics as a profession. Information should be equitably distributed in a timely fashion to all people working in libraries.

While much has been written in academic literature about faculty status for certain library workers, that discussion is irrelevant.² This chapter will focus on how all employees (regardless of rank, title, classification) working together can form a finely tuned ecosystem that benefits all involved- from the students and faculty and researchers who use library spaces and services to those working in these roles. In the absence of a mutually beneficial ecosystem, a harmful hierarchical power dynamic could become personally detrimental to employees, organizationally damaging to the libraries, and also felt more broadly by the students and researchers (as well as

overall institutions) that libraries are created to serve. It is important to note that rankism and marginalization can affect workers both within the library and within the overall academic institution.

Over the past three decades, academic libraries have undergone a tremendous evolution that has led to a changing sphere of influence within academic institutions. Some of these changes have resulted in retrenchment. Documenting value and presenting relevancy has become critical for the future of libraries and all parts of the higher education landscape. As libraries are influenced by updates to technology, systems, procedures, and processes, it is imperative that terminology related to employee experience is updated as well. At present, positional nomenclature appears to lag behind and harkens back to older systems of classification. Terms such as *support staff* and *paraprofessional*, which are widely used in library vernacular, are problematic and can often be used in a marginalizing, demeaning, or disrespectful manner. These terms enforce hierarchical and sociocultural norms within the library (and/or academic institution) itself. This is in direct contradiction with the American Library Association (ALA) Code of Ethics, specifically items 5-8:

5. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
6. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
7. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
8. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.³

When mutual respect is lacking, role confusion and diffusion are rampant, and information banking and control issues invariably rise.

Rankism

When unabated, unnecessary differences in how employees are treated can result in abuses of power, lack of recognition, missed professional opportunities, and other negative consequences that can drive a wedge between the faculty and the staff, thus affecting the overall organizational culture of the library. Dr. Robert W. Fuller, former president of Oberlin College, defines this phenomenon as rankism and has written extensively about the subject:

Rankism is the exploitation or humiliation of those with less power or lower status. Simply put, rankism occurs when the somebodies of the world use the power of their rank to take advantage over those they see as nobodies. Rankism is the root cause of a wide variety of dominating behaviors. As the general cause of indignity, rankism is no more defensible than the now familiar indignities of racism, sexism, etc [However,] eliminating rankism doesn't mean eliminating rank any more than getting rid of racism

means getting rid of race. Rank can be a useful organizational tool that, used properly, helps us achieve group goals. It is the abuse of rank that cries out for our attention.⁴

Rankism in academic libraries may not be premeditated or intentional as it is so ingrained in the organizational culture of academia, making it challenging to identify and diagnose and difficult to eradicate. It is all that much harder because, as illustrated previously, the classification of library employees can be institutionally dependent. Not all institutions with faculty/staff demarcations have issues with rankism, and not all institutions with all library employees considered staff are immune either.

Certain differences between the broad groupings of faculty and staff are embedded in the nature of those roles, varied responsibilities within the library, and different requirements for professional development as well as pay and benefits. It is not our aim to suggest these differences should not exist. Instead, it is the unnecessary differences that need to be addressed. These include

- recognizing and citing employee contributions to projects,
- garnering input or saving a seat at the proverbial table for all staff members, and
- supporting professional development and personal growth regardless of employee rank, title, or possession of an MLIS.

Transforming organizational culture, empowering employees in all roles to succeed, improving morale, and fostering employee engagement are arguably in the hands of all employees, yet most certainly must begin with effective leadership. A healthy organizational culture should be a top priority for managers at all levels as happy team members will be more productive and remain with the organization longer than unhappy ones. Approaching leadership responsibilities from a position of empathy, encouragement, and openness will create an environment where all employees can ask tough questions, challenge the status quo, and be empowered to effect change in the organization and for their own professional development.

Though it is a norm within academic libraries in general, rankism is condoned and even exemplified in the nomenclature. Librarians are deemed professionals, and all other library employees are often referred to as paraprofessionals. A paraprofessional, by definition, is "a trained aide who assists a professional person (such as a teacher or doctor)."⁵ Though this definition may be true, it implies less education, knowledge, and experience, whether or not that is accurate. Often, non-librarian staff members hold advanced degrees in a variety of subjects; some even hold MLIS degrees even though they are not employed in traditional librarian positions. Despite possibly having many years of experience and education, these categorizations of professional and paraprofessional assign a hierarchy that contributes to rankism in academic libraries.

When discussing the use of "para" roles, one could refer to the use in other organizational paradigms such as paralegals in legal circles. Yet, an academic library is more accurately likened to a medical center/hospital. The hospital employs a range of individuals from physicians to phlebotomists, from health educators to billing specialists, from facility managers to administrative assistants, and so on. There are, of course, levels of stratification and hierarchy within the hospital setting. Yet, it would be surprising for someone to imply that a nurse, radiologist, or hospital administrator are not professionals. In fact, they are often referred to as "medical professionals." So why is it acceptable in academic libraries?

This discussion of rankism and marginalization is not to suggest that there should be no hierarchy related to the functional nature of positions within the academic library. Instead, it should serve as a reminder that employees should be valued and respected as professionals regardless of their ranks or job titles, and descriptions need not refer to other roles by using potentially demeaning terminology. The nomenclature of libraries has been evolving rapidly—from circulation to now user experience, for example. Not to mention that there is already plenty of discussion about whether the term *librarian* should continue to be used as we are seeing new variations, such as research specialist, information officer, and knowledge manager. In the federal sector, many knowledge workers are referred to as information analysts. Consequently, we are advocating for the elimination of the term *paraprofessional*.

In fact, even using the term *paralibrarian* in lieu of paraprofessional does not fully solve the problem as there are many professional roles within an academic library that do not require an MLIS degree. Subsequently, deciding which roles should be designated paralibrarian would once again vary on an institutional basis. However, the term *paralibrarian* is certainly better aligned with terminology in other fields such as paramedic, paralegal, or paraeducator, and it does not carry the same negative connotations as paraprofessional. The ALA Code of Ethics states, "We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession."⁶ If new terms such as *user experience*, *scholarly communications*, and *community engagement* have now found a place in the library lexicon, we-experts at classification and information management—should be able to determine better categories for those employed in the library workforce.

Librarians with academic appointments have an abundance of literature, conference sessions, and publishing opportunities available to them because contributions to the field are expectations based on their roles. However, the palpable dearth of information about the professional development needs of paralibrarians—as promulgated and suggested by some people serving in paralibrarian roles—is difficult to ignore. We acknowledge that it would be challenging to create a professional development system for all levels of staff without standards for implementation, stated outcomes, or even suggested funding sources. Yet, there appears to be stratification present between the needs and expectations for those with an MLIS degree and everyone else.

The Allied Professional Association (APA) operates as an extension of the ALA and was established to "promote the mutual professional interests of librarians and other library workers."⁷ The website hosts various resources located within its Library Support Staff Resource Center, with information about paralibrarian professional organizations, a nominal amount of research literature, employment statistics, library career progression, and continuing education programs.⁸ Unfortunately, a significant portion of the information presented is outdated—and more than ten years old; much of the research cites literature from several decades ago, and little research has been included on the site in the years since that focuses exclusively on paralibrarian staff. Also, based on information provided by ALA, the terminal goal of career progression and consequently subject mastery is the attainment of an MLIS degree in order to become a librarian. This presents true cognitive dissonance: The modern academic library employs expert staff—some with PhDs, some with extensive technical expertise—who want to continue working in libraries yet do not want to obtain MLIS degrees. Where do these individuals fit into a career progression model for the field?

Of equal concern is the question of *who* is ultimately responsible for its ongoing implementation? Undergraduate degree-holding paraprofessionals find themselves in a space where the onus of professional development lies with themselves. This is especially troubling with the growth of bachelor of science in library and information science (BSLIS) and bachelor of science in information science (BSIS) programs-and how these students would be perceived in the current paradigm. According to Christina Neigel, "An emphasis on the individual can directly conflict with the notion of the 'public good,' a value that is codified in the ALA Core Values of Librarianship."⁹ Academic libraries contending with shrinking budgets and professional development funds have tough choices to make; however, the professional growth of paraprofessional staff need not be minimized. In addition, leaders should consider that there are plenty of options for career development that do not have to include obtaining the MLIS degree.

On the other hand, the so-called de-professionalization of librarianship has been a point of contention among those in the field that perceive the lack of an MLIS degree as an affront to librarians' role and identity in society. The impact being made by non-MUS-holding colleagues in the field by obtaining influential national leadership positions (including those at the Institute of Museum and Library Services [IMLS] and several ARL [Association of Research Libraries] institutions) has become an additional challenge for professional librarians already in the position of defending the importance of the MLIS, including the comprehensive academic preparation and ethical standards inherent in the degree. Librarian Meredith Farkas discusses the push by some to require the master's degree for ALA leadership on her blog, *Information Wants to Be Free*. She states, "One big argument I kept hearing was that we needed someone who understood and had experience in libraries." 10 Libraries are full of passionate, qualified staff members who do not -and never will -possess an MLIS. Many, many ALA members do not have an MLIS, yet somehow the idea of someone without an MLIS representing the ALA was repugnant to some (and to others signaled the death knell for our profession), asserts Farkas.¹¹

It is possible some librarians harbor resentment toward paraprofessionals because they see aspects of their work being done successfully without benefit of the degree. The ALA's Office for Library Personnel Resources states, "Librarians ... may wonder what their role in the organization is if functions they have traditionally carried out are transferred to someone who does not have formal library education. For some librarians, as for some paraprofessionals, this leads to questioning self-worth."¹² Likewise, with the evolution of technology and related transformation of library service needs, paraprofessionals may find their roles have been modified to include tasks formerly performed by professional librarians, yet their status and/or compensation have not changed accordingly. Dialogue concerning self-worth and consequently workplace morale has led to conflict among, and within, each group.

Rather than accentuate any possible extant disharmony, we desire to provide context to the phenomena by examining implications to the morale and professional growth of library employees who do not hold MLIS degrees as well as persons who do hold one working in non-librarian roles. These conflicts may negatively influence organizational structure, culture, and ultimately general library operations. Librarians have a voice in policy making and should use it to advocate for their differently credentialed colleagues. Differently credentialed colleagues should have their own seats at the table too. Librarians can provide mentorship, communicate scholarship opportunities, encourage research/writing pursuits, and extend committee appointments to paraprofessionals all for the betterment of the academic library.

The morale and professional limitations of a mentality primarily concerned with defining who a librarian is rather than focusing on what a librarian does are obvious. The current model of

librarianship expends resources on maintaining exclusivity in spite of ideals that promote inclusivity- a practice that pigeonholes the potential of paraprofessionals and librarians themselves. Rebecca Stavick, executive director of technology library Do Space, believes that "today's workforce demands skills, not degrees."¹³ Those skills can be found throughout the library organization and are often possessed by individuals without an MLIS.

Likewise, it should be noted that library workers may occupy support staff roles rather than faculty roles not because they are unqualified but because they are underemployed, newly graduated, or residing in geographic areas in which the academic library field is oversaturated with qualified candidates. As flexible options for alternative degree programs have increased-evening classes, low residence, or fully online distance learning programs-so has the feasibility of obtaining a degree while working full time or parenting. In turn, the likelihood that the job market has become oversaturated with MLIS graduates is real-with salaries for new graduates flat and large applicant pools for entry-level positions.¹⁴ This has resulted in some new graduates accepting job offers for positions for which they are overqualified (simply to get in the door), as well as those who have returned to obtain MLIS degrees while already working full time in libraries potentially remaining in their existing positions.

The advent of the internet has drastically changed what and how services are provided in libraries. It is only natural that staffing and job duties have changed as well. In technical services departments, there are fewer professional librarians cataloging, and those duties have shifted to their staff counterparts. In reference departments, the need for librarians to serve as liaisons across campus and assume a larger role in instruction has resulted in their staff counterparts filling more shifts at the reference desk or diverting reference services to a centralized service desk. Also, it is well documented that the number of questions at the reference desk requiring the assistance of a professional librarian have decreased over time, and the role of the reference desk is more as triage for referrals to librarians when necessary.¹⁵

In many cases, the shifts in roles and job duties may have occurred without including the staff in the conversations. Supervisors reassign duties or they organically shift as faculty members assume other duties; staff members are not always educated about the motivating factors behind the changes being made. It is a situation ripe for strife and must be mitigated with empathy, openness, and direct communication from supervisors. All library employees should have a voice during planning meetings as library strategic goals change. Actively engaging library workers in these conversations provides an opportunity for all employees to ask questions, express concerns, and better understand the context for decisions being made. In short, it is imperative to treat all workers with the same dignity and respect. The result is a more engaged and empowered library workforce; employees are less likely to feel that a decision has been made with no consideration of its impact on affected parties. Leaders must often make tough decisions, but including all employees in the process is critical for the successful buy-in of any new initiative as well as for employee morale. Those in non-MLIS roles often have an incredible depth and breadth of library experience and may very well be able to suggest alternative solutions from their unique perspectives. Additionally, by engaging all employees in the conversation, supervisors are modeling treating other employees as valued colleagues rather than assistants or helpers, which may in turn inspire all- regardless of role within the library hierarchy-to do the same.

A new paradigm for librarianship

We propose a new model of librarianship in which librarians focus less on gatekeeping and more on opportunity seeking. Eliminating the de-professionalization dialogue to concentrate on previous work experience, shared responsibilities, and the acquisition of twenty-first-century skills necessary to sustain inclusive, responsive academic libraries is a necessary first step. Paralibrarians can excel at all tiers of the library organization because they are passionate and knowledgeable about the work- not because they hold an MLIS. They contribute their time, knowledge, and unique expertise to library committees at the national, state, and local levels. Paralibrarians make our organizations less homogeneous and more reflective of the society that we live in. They broaden thought leadership and promote inclusion in our institutions. Librarianship's recognition of these varied backgrounds should be viewed not as a liability but as an essential asset during a time when our universities are teeming with dynamism.

Workplace Dignity

Rankism may manifest differently in various academic libraries and may be related to physical workspace allotment, how or to what degree employees are supervised, and professional development support, among many other examples. Failing to include employees in meetings and conversations that have a direct impact on their work reflects a devaluing of library workers as integral members of the team and usurp their agency in decision-making. Likewise, failure to recognize and cite the work of all contributors to a project can result in an erasure of the staff person's effort. In our observation, library faculty members are often allowed more autonomy than their nonfaculty counterparts. These examples are emblematic of organizational culture and reflect unnecessary differences.

Treating people with dignity, no matter where they fall on the corporate, social, familial, or political ladder, is the key to overcoming rankism in all its manifestations. In rankism environments, creativity is stifled, students can't learn, workers are disloyal, health is compromised, families suffer dysfunction, and victims want revenge. Dignity is the antidote.¹⁶

David Yamada, professor of law at Suffolk University and expert on workplace bullying, is interested in the concept of workplace dignity from the perspective of employment law. He reports that his work draws heavily on the writing of Robert Fuller about rankism. Yamada expresses that he takes issue with some of Fuller's work but that "one of Fuller's genuine triumphs is to argue successfully that individuals should not be required to sacrifice their personal dignity for the sake of earning a living. In doing so he bridges a noticeable gap, connecting the broader theme of dignity with a growing body of literature related specifically to issues of dignity in the workplace."¹⁷

Fuller's work has a lot to offer the field of management, whether in libraries or any workplace. He asserts that promoting dignity makes a work environment more successful and productive. "Negative motivation-fear of demotion or job loss- is now dwarfed by the positive motivation that comes from being part of a team of responsible professionals. Eliminating malrecognition in the work place is proving as good for the bottom line as eliminating malnutrition was for the productivity of day laborers."¹⁸ Workers who experience dignity, regardless of rank, are more motivated and, it is fair to surmise, experience far greater job satisfaction as they are recognized and appreciated for their contributions.

Engaging and equally valuing all library employees

Leaders must model the behavior and traits they want to see as part of an improved work environment. This is a "do as I do" proposition: Supervisors must lead by example by demonstrating equitable treatment of all employees. Recognition and appreciation of employee efforts must be made customary as they are embedded in every communication. If a staff person creates a spreadsheet that a faculty member uses in a presentation, that work should be recognized and credited. Similarly, the professional development of all employees regardless of rank should be equally supported. Whether it is an email sent out to increase awareness of a professional opportunity or regularly checking in with employees about their professional goals, staff members deserve the same onboarding and continuous mentorship opportunities that their faculty counterparts receive. As noted earlier, funding for professional development activities is generally higher for the faculty than for the staff. This is inherent in the nature of those ranks as faculty must conduct these activities for promotion and tenure. However, it is incumbent upon supervisors to find ways to encourage the staff, even if funding is not always available. Supervisors can encourage all employees to participate in low-cost or free professional development opportunities such as webinars. Most professional organizations offer scholarships, some specifically for staff members, to attend conferences. Often there are additional resources through a university's staff senate to support the staff in professional development opportunities. Clearly, supervisors cannot spend their days searching for funding opportunities for the staff, but they can lead by example by encouraging, educating, and allowing time for such endeavors by their employees across all role types. Further, supervisors can be creative with their budgets as financial support for continued development is a great way to communicate to an employee how much that employee is valued as a member of the team.

In like manner, supervisors who exhibit receptivity to new ideas, as well as to questions with no easy answers without becoming defensive, will inspire a robust give-and-take as true collaboration begins. Employees who feel psychologically safe in their work environment will be more likely to offer their ideas as well as respectfully challenge decisions with which they do not agree. A willingness to hear suggestions and consider all the options will keep all employees active in improving the organizational culture and the quality of work. Supervisors should pay attention to how employees participate in meetings or collaborative efforts. Are employees expressing their ideas in group meetings regardless of job type? For example, in an academic library with clearly delineated faculty and non-faculty categories, are staff members comfortable sharing ideas with the faculty? Are faculty members acknowledging and actively engaging with the staff in planning sessions? Additionally, if an instruction session is being planned for students that will involve both the faculty and the staff, are both parties represented at all the planning sessions? It appears common for the staff to be brought into planning discussions once many of the decisions have already been made. Faculty members often rely on staff members for their technical expertise or to provide additional manpower during instructional sessions. Rather than dictating the logistical details of a session to a staff person via email, a faculty member has an opportunity to empower that staff member by meaningfully involving them in the planning process. Staff members are often asked to serve in the same roles and may have a better idea of how much time an activity will take, how to best organize the space, or how to best record an event or document a presentation. However, they are not always provided the opportunity to share their full expertise, which results in frustration as staff members do not feel valued or respected for their ability to make significant contributions.

Changing organizational culture

Ethics and values are aspects of organizational culture exemplified in the presence of the abuses of rankism mentioned earlier. Though a leader may not have originated the culture of an organization, it is important that they work to actively change the culture when it is negative. A library's administration would likely agree in theory that employees should be treated equally and with respect, but at times their behavior may not always indicate as much. Those in positions of library leadership may be ethical, but they may not be exhibiting ethical behavior consistently in their decision-making and communications. The actions of leaders must go further than writing a good mission statement to effect change in organizational culture. Equitable treatment of all staff members must be modeled and practiced daily with all employees.

Authors K. C. Panda and Manik Mandal discuss that libraries need to adopt a corporate culture, in that they must treat "library services as 'knowledge-based business' without profit and to make the information products and services of a library most clientele-friendly."¹⁹ While that thought applies more to the "front of house" culture of a library and how all employees need to provide good customer service to remain relevant and effective, the ability to provide effective communications and build healthy relationships with patrons is no doubt highly correlated with library workers benefiting from a positive organizational culture behind the scenes. Happier employees equal more productive and efficient employees.

Culture surrounds us all, and we need to understand how it is created, embedded, developed, manipulated, managed, and changed. The primary mission of the libraries is building, organizing, accessing, maintaining, preserving, interpreting, and educating in the use of scholarly information resources, which enable the teaching-learning process and research. In order to fulfill this mission, the libraries must have a staff that is qualified, informed, well trained, dedicated, and appreciated.²⁰

Let us emphasize that library workers must be informed, well trained, and appreciated. Supervisors may not have as much control over an employee's initial qualifications or their ultimate dedication yet can have a direct impact on the how well they are informed, the training they receive, and communicating and demonstrating appreciation of them.

Dealing with the conflict created by rankism is an excellent starting place for leaders to effect change in a library's culture. And defining the cause of the conflict in specific terms is critical. In their article "Change and Conflict in the Academic Library," authors Catherine Edwards and Graham Walton reference the work of Laurie Mullins, which identifies the main sources of conflict in organizations as "differences in perception, limited resources, departmentalization and specialization, nature of work activities, role conflict, inequitable treatment, violation of territory and environmental change."²¹ Though all of these types of conflict are represented in academic libraries, some have a more significant impact than others on the daily function of the library. While Edwards and Walton acknowledge the evidence that conflict is not necessarily inherently bad, they do make the point that poorly managed conflict is indeed detrimental. It goes without saying that rapid environmental changes such as technological innovations have drastically altered the work of libraries and are at least partially to blame for some of the conflict. Library employees have seen their work and roles change swiftly and have felt the pressure to simply survive.

Referring to the leadership of academic libraries, there are several potential causes for the reticence to deal with conflict. It is possible that some leaders do not care as long as the work is being done; however, it is also possible that creating a shift in organizational culture is much harder than deciding which books to include in the next exhibit. "If conflict is endemic in academic LIS, this suggests that it is not being properly addressed or managed. Reasons for this may lie in the historical culture of LIS, which could fairly be described as non-confrontational. Libraries have traditionally wished to retain their image of scholarly calm."²² It is not just the advent of new technologies that have changed how libraries must provide services; it is also paradigm shifts in how students learn and access information. That external cultural shift has only added to the need for an internal cultural shift in libraries.

The complexity of changing organizational culture is perhaps best described in the work of Gabrielle Ka Wai Wong and Diana L. H. Chan who differentiate between adaptive challenges and technical challenges. Technical problems have clear definitions and known solutions that can be implemented by current knowledge, through application of existing professional expertise, or using the organization's current structures or procedures. On the other hand, adaptive challenges are ones for which the experts or organizational leaders have not yet developed an adequate response. They do not have clearly defined problems; further learning is needed to identify problems and find solutions.²³

Because of those differences, an adaptive challenge requires that a leader spend time learning about the problem and how to correct it. Leaders must be open to listening to employees and allowing for a collaborative effort to develop solutions. Stephen Mossop, in his book *Achieving Transformational Change in Academic Libraries*, contends that the challenge for change agents

is not just that of designing, implementing, and embedding the changes and improvements necessary to allow the organization to progress; they must first disrupt and change the culture which underpins the *ancien régime*, and which otherwise will threaten the success of any change initiative, and cultivate in its place a more fertile environment in which the seeds of change can take root and flourish.²⁴

Adaptive challenges require adaptive leadership. Specifically, the library administration needs to engage with all employees in an honest, transparent way in their actions and in their communications. Listening to and understanding the perspective of various stakeholders will help develop trust as well as help identify where the culture needs to be disrupted and altered.

Wong and Chan suggest some very practical steps for adaptive leaders: get on the balcony, give the work back to people, regulate distress using a "holding environment," and maintain disciplined attention. To get *on the balcony* essentially means that an adaptive leader needs to look at situations in a more global sense. Instead of viewing problems as a failure of an individual employee, they must question how the larger system may be at fault. Also, adaptive leaders need to involve everyone in the process. Rely on the expertise of employees by allowing them to take the lead in problem solving when appropriate. Regulating distress using a "holding environment" is essentially the practice of creating a safe space for employees. Employees need to feel safe in asking hard questions and expressing their frustrations. Adaptive leaders need to allow employees time and space to change and process the emotions that accompany it. Maintaining disciplined attention might be described in the proverbial keeping one's eye on the ball. Avoidance of difficult issues, resistance to change, and conflicts are all part of the

adaptation process, so persistence and staying focused on resolution is key.²⁵ Thus, there are even more reasons for leaders to garner buy-in by authentically involving all employees in decision-making and the conversation about change throughout the process.

Leaders need to foster an environment where even uncomfortable issues can be discussed openly and in spaces that those who are questioning norms are protected. Employees must be encouraged to take on shared responsibility for the organization. Leaders should encourage individual initiative while also helping employees manage the potential stress of their supervisors not having all the answers and allowing time for change to actually develop. In their willingness to share the power in the change process, managers need to help develop the leadership skills of employees by giving them not only opportunities but also support and feedback. And adaptive leaders need to make self-reflection and continuous learning an organizational norm by allowing space for difficult questions and less-than-glowing feedback as well as by honoring risk taking and experimentation among employees.

Author Brian Quinn describes the evolution of the field of psychology from a field focused on the negatives of human behavior or mental illness to that of focusing on the positives of human behavior: "These qualities include such positive mental states as optimism, happiness, joy, altruism, creativity, and hope."²⁶ Quinn asserts that positive psychology can enhance performance in the workplace, specifically in libraries. He reported that the Gallup Corporation has supported several conferences about positive psychology and Gallup researchers have studied what makes individuals and groups productive in organizations.

What they found is that high-performing companies have employees with very positive emotional states. These employees are characterized by Gallup researchers as demonstrating high amounts of interest, caring, and joy in their work. Managers in these organizations foster positive emotions in employees by paying attention to their needs and recognizing their unique contributions. Meeting the basic needs of employees frees them to devote maximum attention and cognition to their work and to achieving the goals of the organization. Workers who regularly receive positive feedback about their contributions are motivated to think about how they can accomplish even more for the organization.²⁷

These are not revolutionary ideas. Making sure employees are supported and appreciated are among the most basic tasks of good leadership. However, not all library administrators possess a solid foundation in leadership skills. These "accidental administrators" are not without hope as they simply need to be open to learning, self-reflection, receiving feedback, and good two-way communication with their employees. Organizational culture can be well established, and employees may prefer the status quo to the uncertainty and hard work involved in change. It is incumbent upon leaders to chart the course by creating a more positive environment for their employees while remaining at the sides of employees in the trenches, cheering them on, as they learn and adapt.

Conclusion

Librarianship should embody the values of the profession, particularly to the paraprofessionals who are also a part of the profession, and to those outside the academic library who see this dichotomy play out. The "us" versus "them" ideology does nothing to benefit either group and further undermines the role of academic libraries. As the field of library and information sciences continues to change and evolve, it is critical that nomenclature as well as human resources practices for employee engagement and talent management keep pace. Further research about

employee relations topics such as and especially those affecting library workers of all education levels, including those of non-MLIS professionals and paraprofessionals, should be embraced by the ALA and other organizations that care about the future of libraries and information agencies. We strongly advocate that use of the term paraprofessional be discontinued due to its reinforcement of hegemonic paradigms. Additionally we recommend that more research be conducted about non-faculty empowerment and engagement in library governance in tenure-track library environments as well as further exploration about workplace dignity in academic libraries.

Notes

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