Feature

Preparation for management

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According to the ALIA curriculum guidelines, base level professional courses in library and information studies should, in part, be concerned with the definition of the purpose, planning, delivery and evaluation of information services, together with basic coverage of management theory and analysis of current management practices as they apply to the delivery of information services to a variety of users. This leaves the individual educator and library school with considerable scope for deciding the extent, range and level of management education in their curriculum.

Some practitioners believe that students are too young or inexperienced and cannot relate theory to work situations; some recommend abandoning management teaching and concentrating on the nature of the professional response by librarians to user groups and their needs, including consideration of priority judgement in professional rather than management terms; and there are a small number who believe that there is a need for management to be taught in sufficient depth to permit the student to become a manager.

I believe that the purpose of teaching library management is to enable professional librarians to become aware of, and gain knowledge and skills which will enable them to make the best use of their resources, whether those resources are materials, staff, systems or services. Basic management skills such as decision-making, problem-solving, planning, and communication support the profession-specific knowledge and skills required to achieve library goals. The aim of pre-service education to cover these management fundamentals is achievable, but continuing education is essential to ensure quality library management in the future.

Basis for curriculum

Most educators and practitioners have seen formal pre-service education as part of the preparation for library management. For example, a comprehensive review of the library management literature of the 1970s [Janet Shuter's 'Library management development' *Management bibliographies and reviews, Vol 7* (1), 1981] revealed a consensus amongst educators and practitioners that would encompass a core curriculum based on consideration of the library as a total system, addressing skills useable during the first few years of professional practice, emphasising supervisory and people-centred skills, and not based on a demand that the student identify with top management.

Other studies such as those by Ida Vincent [*The teaching of management in base-level postgraduate education for librarianship* Sydney: University of NSW, 1986] and the resultant consultation between educators and practitioners [Nicholson, Fay. 'Demands and Directions: a consultation on library management education', *Education for librarianship: Australia*, 4 (2), Winter 1987: 40-45] have influenced in a similar way the philosophical basis for curriculum development in library management education in Australia.

The need to manage change has been a significant driving force behind the library management education agenda in recent years. During *Educating for change: grasping the vision*, a conference organised by the Eduction for Library and Information Services section of ALIA in Melbourne in June 1991, Alison Crook, then NSW state librarian, said 'perhaps the most obvious outcome of the need to do more with less is the need for better management skills. These are no longer an optional extra for librarians but a matter of survival skills. Librarians must be able to think strategically. They must understand planning techniques; be able to handle work-flow analysis; understand and be able to apply principles of job design; understand and be able to develop performance measures; and have at least some understanding of statistics and research methodology.'

In a 1989 issue of the *Journal of library administration* (Vol 11, N° 3/4), two writers pooled their many years of academic library experience to say that good communication skills are needed to sustain good working relationships. Library managers now seek recruits with personal qualities that suggest underlying abilities for ongoing professional growth and development and with the potential to take on increased responsibilities in the future. [Runyon, Robert S and Dickson, Laura K (1990) 'Administrative expectations in the recruitment of academic librarians' in *Library education and employer expectations*. New York: Haworth Press. pp. 97–105]

In the same publication, Gary Strong, California's state librarian catalogues the expectations of managers responsible for hiring entry-level staff, they included good sense of planning and organisation, communication and team building skills, willingness to consider alternatives and to manage activities, willingness and ability to take responsibility for the unit assigned and have an ownership stake in the services rendered.

Key competencies

Add to this now the key competencies that employers want. Various lists identify a range of knowledge and skill areas — goal-setting and motivation, speaking, listening, organisational effectiveness, problem-solving, reading, writing, negotiating, creative thinking, teamwork, interpersonal skills, knowing how to learn, career devel-

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opment, and leadership. When our students graduate from secondary school with these competencies, then I suggest that we may need to re-develop the library management curriculum. Until then, a number of these areas need to be included as part of their tertiary education.

What do new graduates need?
In a recent study, I asked a range of Australian and New Zealand library practitioners what they felt about the needs for management skills, in order to *indicate* library supervision and management education and training needs so that tertiary courses in particular can provide the most useful education and training for new and recently qualified professionals.

Most highly ranked were: interpersonal skills, skills in communication, problem solving, time management, decision making, planning, stress management, management of library technology, report writing, meetings, participative management, management of change, team management, negotiation, conflict management, organisational climate, and performance measurement.

In the same study, some librarians commented that they had difficulty in deciding on what skills and knowledge were most usefully taught in base-level courses. In a large library, a newly-qualified librarian might be involved only in direct service provision, while in a smaller library there will be an immediate requirement to supervise staff, delegate, monitor, plan, even to prepare and monitor a program or departmental budget to some extent. In a large library such responsibilities generally will be delegated progressively.

Many management skills can be learned on the job when the skills will be practised more regularly. Without the chance for practical application, some skills will be forgotten, and opportunities for practising some managerial skills can arrive late in our career.

The kinds of positions available to newly qualified professionals are so varied that different levels of knowledge and skill may be required. Library management education needs to cater for the needs of those who will be practising those skills when they graduate. We do not know where graduates will be in their first few years after qualification. We do know that many of our graduates begin their careers with the supervision of staff as one of their requirements. And we do know that a percentage of our students are already working in libraries, and are able to utilise their management studies in their current positions — for example solving problems, dealing with conflicts, making planning decisions, or writing statements of policy as part of an assignment and then utilising the results in their work.

Current issues such as quality management, performance, productivity achievement, the management of change and stress all contribute to the need to constantly re-evaluate the library management curriculum. A recent article by Joan Bechtel ['Leadership lessons learned from managing and being managed' *Journal of academic librarianship*, 18 (6), Jan 1993: 352–357] lists and explains a number of workplace conditions that contribute to low levels of productivity and commitment. To the author, writing from experience, the roots of powerlessness were — at various times — lack of significant work, lack of sufficient knowledge, lack of respect and appreciation of good work, exclusion, lack of control, lack of participation in decision-making, and lack of ownership of the successes and failures of the library in question.

It is deficiencies such as these which we are attempting to deal with in teaching and learning about management, and which can be overcome through supervisors and managers practising the skills and techniques — effective communication, team approaches, participation in decision-making — which they begin to learn as students. ■

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