

# Impact of industrial and educational change on training and development

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In Australia, the combination of changes in the workforce profile, the nature of work and industrial agreements and the role of education and training gave rise to the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA). It can be described as a co-operative national response by government, unions and employers to economic and industry restructuring, including labour market imperatives and emerging requirements arising from workplace reform. The main aim is to increase the competitiveness and productivity of Australian industry through industry-responsive reform of the vocational education and training system.

Flexibility to meet enterprise requirements within a stable and consistent national system was essential for reform to occur. The development of a National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT) and nationally endorsed industry competency standards, along with *The Training Guarantee Act* (now in suspension), were intended to ensure that the Federal Government's major reform program for education and training for Australian industry took effect.

What impact have these changes had on staff development and training in libraries? The complex and bureaucratic nature of the reforms have resulted in a slow adoption rate for many of the changes they seek to promulgate. To date, the various aspects of both industrial and educational reform have had different rates of uptake in the library and information industry. For example, libraries with restructured awards have embraced multi-skilling. This has impacted heavily on training programs. Yet, for some libraries, particularly those with few staff, the impetus for multi-skilling was not award restructuring but the need for staff to be able to achieve a wide range of outcomes. In these situations, multi-skilling was already a firm part of the training culture. What is less clear is how multi-skilling has actually effected productivity outcomes.

Most library sectors have moved from an initial award restructuring phase to an enterprise bargaining phase. Due to the enterprise specific nature of agreements, the training outcomes are not as clearly or universally articulated as they were under state and federal awards. A few link directly with the relevant industry competency standards,

but more often than not, training requirements are buried in schedules covering processes for redesigning work. In these circumstances, organisations with less well developed training and development cultures than libraries, may find their priorities focussing on cost reduction at the expense of highly skilled, well trained employees.

The NTRA and the TGA were intended to target industry areas which traditionally had low investment in training. They offered strategies for improving participation and quality in training. Even though most libraries have always valued staff development and training, many of the features of the NTRA have not been adopted enthusiastically and many libraries are unable to spend on training the minimum amount of 1.5 per cent of their budgets which was required under the TGA.

The NTRA focuses on the development of a nationally consistent, competency-based approach to vocational education and training, with a focus on workplace training. It is designed to complement and support other microeconomic reform initiatives such as labour market reform, for example, enterprise bargaining. Essential features of the NTRA such as NFROT and competency standards and competency-based training have yet to have a major impact on libraries. ALIA has endorsed the NFROT principles for use in all continuing professional education courses. Yet there is scant evidence of their application in libraries, even though there is great scope for their incorporation in the design, delivery and evaluation of on-the-job and in-house training programs.

Libraries have had nationally-endorsed industry competency standards for two years now and their integration and deployment in the workplace has been slow. Despite extensive industry consultation and the groundbreaking involvement of ALIA in their development, only a handful of libraries across all sectors have attempted to make serious use of them. Impediments cited include incompatibility with parent organisation's human resources processes and/or requirements, a philosophical distrust of the notion of 'competence' as the appropriate approach to professional work, the problem of competency standards keeping abreast of rapidly changing workplace knowledge, skills

and attitudes and the thorny problem of assessment — who will deem library staff competent, and how?

The national core curriculum for library technicians incorporates the industry competency standards and appropriate cross-industry standards. The library and information industry is about to receive its first graduates from this program. Perhaps this, along with a revision of the standards, a resolution to the assessment question and a slow, but steady increase in the number of libraries incorporating the standards and thereby providing models for others, will speed up their adoption.

In introducing these staff development and training strategies into libraries, it is clear that internal, as well as external, imperatives come into play. Shrinking budgets in libraries result in a sharper focus on mission and operational priorities. As responsibility and authority are devolved, employees who show initiative, and who are flexible and customer-focussed are in greatest demand.

More than ever before, libraries are facing stiff competition in their core business areas of information provision, education, recreation and preservation and efforts are being made to address and analyse customer needs in a more systematic way. Attention is paid to leadership, strategic planning, the development and utilisation of appropriate benchmarks, continuous improvement, not only of collections and services, but also of infrastructure such as technology, effective costing and business planning, and the on-going implementation of best practice.

The sheer volume of work to be undertaken has sharpened the requirement for project management skills, and for the collection and analysis only of data which is pertinent to process improvement or a library's strategic directions. Library managers are looking for a return on their training investment dollar, and these workplace imperatives have enormous training and development implications for libraries achieving their strategic and operational goals. Within this environment, the education and training philosophy underpinning workplace reform and the NTRA can usefully inform the design, implementation and evaluation of training programs for all library staff. ■