PD or not PD – there really is no question!

Changes in the way people find, search, and locate information have altered the scope and content of skills that librarians need to do their work competently. Librarians, once primarily concerned with collecting, organising, and distributing information, now work in a technological, cultural, and educational environment where the boundaries are constantly moving and being tested.

Technological advances and the way librarians deliver services and information to clients shape what are considered the new competency standards. In basing any improvement on identifying and meeting customer needs, new skills emphasising teamwork, problem solving, IT knowledge, web 2.0 understanding, and more fall under the umbrella of accountability and audit in the central role of professional development and training.

Staff development builds on organisational development and personal and professional growth. It is based on anticipating and responding to challenge and change both at an organisation and individual level and provides a platform for staff to extend their potential benefitting both themselves and their employers. Such learning experiences shape and determine improvements in a person's professional capacity and significantly contribute to a positive organisational strategic direction. Importantly, developing the skills and abilities of library staff is critical to responding and anticipating to changing client demands. Any library staff development program should ensure that staff have the appropriate skills to meet organisational and service objectives. Any growth towards a flexible, knowledgeable, and skilled staff facilitates easier transitions for the organisation to anticipate, adapt, and respond effectively to changing economic, information, and technological changes.

In 2008, a survey of Victorian TAFE libraries (VATL) showed the raditional schema of staff development lay across areas such as supervision, leadership, information technology, service desk induction, and OH&S.

PD topics repeated on a regular basis included:

- Occupational health and safety
- Induction
- Copyright
- MS Office
- Computer skills
- Web 2.0 or 23 things
- Presentation skills
- Cultural awareness training

However, new topics and PD sessions introduced and valued highly by library staff as the new essentials included:

- Web 2.0 knowledge
- Copyright
- Google skills
- Elluminate (licensed collaborative teaching software that facilitates audio, video, web, and social networking
- Research skills
- Database knowledge
- Interview skills
- Service desk standards

Vast changes in technology have generated a greater need for staff training and professional development in order to continually improve the quality of library services. The importance of education and training for staff to synthesise this knowledge and skills and to apply it at the coal face remains self-evident for both continual personal and organisational improvement.

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Your people are the best recruiting tool

Swinburne University Library is fortunate with recruiting. I am going to tell you the secret... to attract good people to your library, you need good people to already be working there. Those good people need to go out and talk about the work they do: at conferences, submit articles to journals, network through social media like Twitter, and get involved with ALIA and other library-related organisations.

The more our staff get out there and engage with the rest of the profession, the better it is for the library in attracting staff when vacancies arise. Our University Librarian, Derek Whitehead, actively encourages our staff to be externally engaged. A delegate at VALA2010 came up to me during the conference and said that her impression of Swinburne University Library from talking to Swinburne staff is that the morale is really high. She is right. Many people here truly love their jobs and it shows.

You may also notice that Swinburne has quite a presence at library conferences, both giving papers and as delegates. We work hard on developing our staff. Helen Reid, who coordinates our library staff development program, works in collaboration with the other library managers and team leaders to build a program that helps our staff to keep their skills up-to-date and relevant. Everyone's performance objectives for the year are directly related to our strategic plan. Training is targeted. In December each year the whole library gathers for the 'Big Day In', a whole day staff development program with external speakers; last year's included Josh Earl, former librarian and now full-time comedian. This will be our fourth year.

For future employers – our library staff make good employees

On staff we have three recently recruited Aurora Leadership Institute graduates. It is not a deliberate recruitment strategy, however, Swinburne is benefiting.

Associate your library with clever people

At the 2008 New Librarians' Symposium, Swinburne University Library sponsored one of the keynote speakers, Mark Pesce. It was a shrewd move. Mark's talk was inspirational and well received. Most importantly it positioned the library as forward thinking and innovative. We want to be perceived as a library that embraces new technology and new ways of working.

Collaborate and Connect

Finally collaborating with other organisations on projects is another way to serendipitously attract staff. Recently our Usability Consultant, Dana McKay, began a project with University of Melbourne. By allowing staff to work with and for other organisations, we enhance our reputation with others in the field.

To recap, your staff are the best ambassadors for your organisation. If they are happy in their work, the profession will know about it. It is a small world and librarians are experts at gathering intelligence on good employers. We happen to think that Swinburne has a lot to offer, as our staff will tell you.

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