Human Capital for your Library

by Irene M.H. Herold

Academic library directors are facing the anticipated wave of retirements that was predicted to have already crested, but was delayed by the 2008 economic situation. Now that the economy has sufficiently recovered, large numbers of library faculty and staff have submitted their notification of retirement. Directors face the real challenge of determining not only current needs, but future directions for academic libraries.

Directors need to present to bosses justifications for positions, the library's contribution to future directions, and the importance to the academic mission of the university that filling library positions accomplishes (especially when that means some other department's vacancy may not get filled.) To do this, library directors need to know trends in the information profession, the campus conversations around the evolving mission and accreditation, and what the library is capable of sustaining. More than this, library directors need to put on their human resources hat and determine whether to hire or grow their own human capital to meet these needs.

The Evolving Landscape

With the rapidly evolving information landscape and projected high turnover due to retirements, administrators are correctly concerned that their investment in human capital consider all ramifications and projected needs. As noted in a recent report from the iSchool at the University of Maryland, "The last several years have been marked by a number of societal challenges and changes" that influence how professional programs prepare their students for careers as librarians.[1] The report lists shifting technologies, the changing nature of information, evolving economies, and transformations in learning approaches as some of the drivers needing to be considered when thinking about current and future workforce skills needed for successful information professionals.

While the iSchool report was focused on evolving its own program of study, it revealed key findings, many of which were more broadly echoed in the Canadian Academic Research Libraries (CARL) "8Rs REDUX CARL Libraries Human Resources Study."[2] The CARL study compared results from an original study in 2004 with a study conducted in 2014. Findings discussed organizational and personnel changes, recruitment in today's context, who the population contains as employees and potential employees, necessary competencies for our employees, and education and training.

From these studies and boots-on-the-ground knowledge, a picture emerges of what is needed to be considered for the future of academic libraries: the competencies, attitudes, and abilities of librarians and library staff. We need to hire today what will serve us for tomorrow. We need creative professional development to grow the expertise from within where reasonable.

Since not all of us are human resource specialists in the field of information science, what follows are some ways to think of these needs that may be helpful considerations in developing your au courant library team whether through internal growth or strategic recruitment.

Coming Soon —

Library Collections without Print Materials

Hiring Today What We Need for Tomorrow? Forecasting Future Skill Set Needs

When I was a new-to-the-profession librarian, the Internet was an emerging technology. Because I never worked in a non-computerized library, I sometimes forgot the consternation facing a profession that was still typing cataloging cards with typewriters.

In the 1990s there were many advertisements for Internet Librarians, which at the time seemed to make sense. There was a new approach to accessing information, which was somewhat intimidating to the computer newbie, so the response was to create a specialist position. Today everyone uses the Internet, and the thought of hiring one specialist who is designated the Internet Librarian is a bit incomprehensible.

The error of the 1990s was to not think holistically about our outcomes, i.e., access to information, but to focus on the technology, i.e., Internet. Today this would be akin to hiring a digital humanities librarian specialist rather than seeking a humanities librarian specialist who incorporated all forms of information in the humanities into their work, regardless of format. We are not always savvy as a profession in identifying what needs a long-term focus to be incorporated into our current work. We also need to be better at hiring for revolutionary new work that is so different and unique we have to support it to maintain relevancy

One approach to enhance our prognosticator abilities may be to peruse the many reports and environmental scans to see what others' best thinking is about the future of academic libraries. Two useful reports are the *Environmental Scan 2015, ACRL* and the *NMC Horizon Report 2015: Library Edition.*

The *Environmental Scan 2015* expands upon an earlier publication called "Top Trends in Academic Libraries," which was published in *College and Research Libraries News* in 2014, and "addresses topics related to higher education in general and their resulting impact on library collections and access, research data services, discovery services, library facilities, scholarly communication, and the library's influence on student success." [3] Broadly, the scan's major concepts related to human resource needs may be summarized as:

• View collections holistically, formats and publishing models are still in flux, and new models of access and scholarship continue to evolve so librarians need ongoing professional development and nimble, flexible thinking to evolve along with this trend;

• "Academic libraries can leverage their expertise and experience in curation, preservation, and data management to support, educate, and facilitate"[4] research data services, and play a role in providing data information literacy as they have done with information literacy which continues the relevancy of instructional librarians, but with a broader focus on multiple literacies;

• Discovery services, which are the providing of a unified search result across multiple resource and collection types, requires library staff with systems thinking and web development skill sets to create services that are helpful to seekers of information;

• Facilities may include new arenas, such as 3D services, makerspaces, and co-located services, requiring employees with the knowledge to help keep the areas functioning and relevant;

• Scholarly communication changes have resulted in librarians not only supporting open access scholarship by educating the campus faculty and administration on their rights, but also by becoming an important publisher of scholarship via institutional repositories. This implies knowledge to navigate licensing, copyright, and manage rights, plus keeping current on the scholarly communication legislation front;

• And finally, Library impact on student success carries with it implications about librarians' roles in instruction and assessment to not only directly impact students, but to also help the campus demonstrate how they graduate successful, educated students.

The *NMC Horizon Report 2015* touches on many of the same topics as the Environmental Scan 2015. These include technology trends and impact on users and librarians, facilities, scholarly communication, and literacies. In the section on "Rethinking the Roles and Skills of Librarians," the report references the Association of Research Libraries' 2030 Scenarios program. The ARL Scenarios responds to the question, "How do we transform our organization(s) to create differential value for future users (individuals, institutions, and beyond), given the external dynamics redefining the research environment over the next 20 years?"[5] Working through scenarios such as the ARL ones, or attending a futures-oriented conference, like *Designing Libraries for the 21st Century,* may provide further context for understanding the changing academic library landscape.

Investing in Human Capital: Traditional vs 21st Century

Once the trends have been examined and the library leader has determined what direction the library is heading, it is time to think about the culture of your library and campus. Many liberal arts colleges are rooted in traditional learning environments, but have adopted 21st Century learning techniques and technologies. While libraries have shown their expertise at incorporating flipped classrooms and on-the-fly assessments into their information literacy curriculum, they may not have staff with the knowledge to handle data management and increasingly complex digital objects, much less curation and preservation.

Many libraries now incorporate learning commons and makerspaces, but with the work of the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture and their tool, Scalar, on the open source horizon for all, the level of creation has ramped up exponentially. Until homogeneous and more generic editing tools become available for the newer digital creation environments, these 21st Century expectations will stretch traditional library employees who work expertly with physical materials, face-to-face research support, and learning management systems. The future is here, so how to meet increasing needs via human capital investment is the question.

Grow Your Own or Take the Plunge and Hire

It may seem like an obvious choice considering numerous retirements to hire the expertise you need. That is not always the best answer. Consider the following: recruitments are expensive and often times fail, especially when vying for talent in emerging areas with a limited pool of competent candidates. Sometimes those recruited from outside the organization have excellent experience with Cadillac resources and tools, but struggle in a smaller, less developed, and less well-funded environment. It takes time to understand not just the needs, but also the culture of a new workplace, so extra onboarding and support may be required to ensure new hire success.

One caveat, we are not good at hiring people who are not "like" us. If you truly need someone who thinks differently and has alternative approaches, then make sure you are not unconsciously weeding them out with your search criteria and committee composition. Ask some outside-the-box campus thinkers to serve on the committee. Vet the criteria by comparing it to other institutions' position descriptions. If your campus uses a recruiter, have them do the first screening to lessen bias. If you do not have access to a recruiter, then ask your human resources officer to remove all names, institutions, and identifying information from cover letters and CVs so all the committee is considering at first are an individual's accomplishments, education, and experience. This will eliminate comments and concerns, such as why would they move to a smaller [you fill in the gap]: town, institution, less prestigious environment, etc.

On the flip side, hiring someone from outside the institution allows fresh ideas and experiences to enhance local knowledge and work. Efficiencies may be gleaned from learning from others' mistakes, so they do not need to be made here. There may be no greater symbolic way of demonstrating new directions than by hiring for new types of positions.

Growing your own has many potential benefits. The person transferred into an area does not need to expend energy learning an unfamiliar environment, but can focus on the new job and patrons. They will already be familiar with campus operating systems and have connections to working the person-to-person networks necessary to getting tasks done. The cogent leader also recognizes that one way to retain talent is to provide new challenges and directions that excite and engage employees. Reassignment is one way to accomplish this.

The downside of growing your own may be the lack of coursework, opportunities, and networks to help the individual be successful. They may not know anyone to contact to mentor them through the learning phase, and if it is a wholly new area to the library and the campus, they may feel isolated and unsupported. Funding for conference and workshop attendance may be limited. While there are many online communities, sometimes for rapid learning attending an intensive experience is needed.

Whether you hire the expertise you need or grow it from within the existing employees, changing directions, adding new areas of knowledge, and providing 21st Century services can be very exciting. It may feel like learning to fly the aircraft while building it, but it will be your craft and you will own it. The outcome may be something unique or modeled upon others' work. How you populate it will affect the timeline for meeting new needs and its success.

Forecasting Continuing Education for Existing Employees

Hiring from outside or reassigning from within does not mean that your work is done. If implementing new areas, then all of the employees will need continuing education to continue to understand the evolving work context. There is no faster way to doom new initiatives than to isolate them and make them so "special" that others do not understand their value and why resources are reallocated in that direction.

For example, the adoption of open access (OA) and institutional repositories (IR) supporting OA documents has been embraced by the academic library community as part of our new work. The 'library as publisher' role via an IR is a stretch from its traditional role. Some library employees may perceive the publisher role as beyond their purview. Others understand it is the coming, or rather cresting, wave of how information professionals increasingly connect to and provide access to information.

Discussions and education around the politics of information and trends in academic libraries are essential to helping your staff understand that this work is now endemic to the library and not just something the techie staff does in isolation. Even when the new strategic direction is universally created and adopted, without continuing education for existing employees, turf wars may sprout up.

If in an environment of tight budgets—and who isn't?— then it is important to have employees who do attend conferences and workshops share their knowledge upon their return. This could be via formal presentation, a brown bag lunch, written report, or actual real time re-presentation of the learning. Many conferences now provide post attendance access to recordings, slides, and captured social media, so the attendee can walk their colleagues through the materials. It will not be the same experience as the actual attendance, but often concurrent sessions could not be attended in real time anyway, so the attendees' knowledge may be reinforced and enhanced too. When everyone learns it is also a viable way of showing the return on the investment of sending an employee to the conference.

While no leader can forecast all of the continuing education needs for employees, encouraging continuous learning for everyone creates an environment where bringing emerging trends to the forefront is encouraged. Library directors should support employees active in local, state, regional, and national library associations; it's beneficial that their employees are linked to others who are active in the field. Many associations now support virtual meetings and provide listservs, blogs, social media, and resources to support those who rally around an area of interest.

The fastest growing interest group in the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) is the Digital Curation Interest Group (DCIG) which has 1,017 members as of August 2015. The activities of the DCIG center around a listserv and a virtual space supported by the umbrella organization for ACRL, the American Library Association (ALA), called ALA Connect.

Library Leadership for the Shifting Human Resource Landscape

Change is a reality in "hire" education. Change management needs leadership. There are many resources available to help strategize how to lead organizational change. John Kotter outlines eight steps in his work *Leading Change*. His seventh step includes hiring, promoting, and developing employees to implement the vision. While Kotter's approach outlines steps for successful change, other works on emotional intelligence can help a leader deal with the human concerns that often arise because of change. Works that may be useful to help expand a leader's understanding of emotional intelligence and diminish employee concerns over change include Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* and his co-authored work with Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. An emotionally intelligent leader helps build a sense of community, instills confidence in those they lead that their feelings are considered, creates an environment where things can be accomplished, and moves in positive directions.

The time to consider what kind of library leadership will best be able to successfully integrate new trends and employees working to deliver services and instruction to meet those trends is before hiring and/or reassignments are made. The leader needs to have a plan with a clear vision of not only the work, but how to meet the human resource needs, from recruiting to implementing to carrying out the work of the 21st Century library. The technology may change. The work place may change from traditional physical resources repository to active learning classroom or makerspace to virtual environment, but people are a constant, whether as learners, employees, or leaders. Knowing the academic library landscape and planning for change can help ensure that the investment in and support of human capital is there to meet campus needs.

References

[1] John Carlo Bertot, Lindsay C. Sarin, and Johnna Percell, "Re-envisioning the MLS: Findings, Issues, and Considerations," August 1, 2015, p. iv.

[2] Kathleen DeLong, Marianne Sorensen, and Vicki Williamson, "8Rs REDUX CARL Libraries Human Resources Study, January 2015.

[3] Association of College and Research Libraries Research Planning and Review Committee, *Environmental Scan 2015* (March 2015), p. 2.

[4] Ibid, p. 9.

[5] http://www.arl.org/focus-areas/planning-visioning/scenario-planning/1074-the-arl-2030-scenarios-a-users-guide-for-research-libraries#.VhrTt_lViko

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The NMC report's research is a collaboration between the New Media Consortium, which is an international not-for-profit of educational technology experts located in Austin, Texas, the University of Applied Science Chur, Technische Informationsbibliothek Hannover, and ETH-Bibliothek Zurich.

Futures Planning Resources

The ARL 2030 Scenarios: A User's Guide for Research Libraries (http://www.arl.org/focus-areas/planning-visioning/scenario-planning/1074-the-arl-2030-scenarios-a-users-guide-for-research-libraries#.VhrTt_lViko)

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