

Keeping up-to-date : is there life after (theological) libraries?

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Current work practices in the LIS and related areas

The certainties of the postwar era - standard working hours, the dominance of full-time employment, secure middle-income jobs, standard roles - have collapsed. What's happening is a shift from career structures within the organisation to a situation where people are expected to maximise their employability by building up their skill portfolios. Individuals at all levels of the work force are having to take responsibility for their long-term employability. New technologies and techniques demand more skill and learning from employees. People who want to progress have to acquire competencies and that can be hard because they don't necessarily know where the job market is going.

LIS competencies in demand now

The preliminary findings of the Library Locums survey of the job market for 1996-97 analysed the jobs handled in the last year. Here are the essential skills employers want in the library and information staff :

- **Original / copy cataloguing** - over 50% of requests are for original or copy cataloguers.
- **Comprehensive ILL or document delivery skills** - such people hard to find
- **Database search skills** - being able to search on a variety of providers such as First Search, Uncover, The British Lending Library and using different networks such as ABN or Ilanet. -these skills much in demand and hard to find.
- The next greatest demand is for **special library experience**, especially legal and business librarians
- Good **reference librarians** as well as a wide range of electronic databases. Given that rapidly expanding middle-sized companies and small businesses are the ones providing the new jobs this is an important demand for our profession to meet.
- **Internet skills** are a must. Nearly everyone uses the Internet in some format.
- Top **computing skills** with the ability to pick up new packages and systems with ease.¹ (Marion Nicolson, Managing Director, Library Locums P/L at the ALIA Board of Education Forum 7-8 October 1997. *Leading the profession into the 21st century: library and information services education.*)
- An understanding of the **appropriate information technology** to acquire, organise and disseminate information and the ability to evaluate critically products and modes of delivery.
- Application of **information management skills** outside the traditional library environment. eg creating databases for use elsewhere in the organisation, indexing data, organising intranets, creating a home page on the World Wide Web.
- **Skills in marketing or sales** and experience working in a commercial environment such

as sales and software support.

- An increase in **Records Management** jobs.
- **Project management.** More senior people are being sought to provide analysis and guidelines for information based projects and being asked to manage the project including supervising non library and IT staff.

Individual qualities sought by employers

Employers want experience and people who have already been trained or taken on further study. They all want people who can fit in easily, take responsibility for their own actions, be a team player, be flexible about tasks, use initiative, embrace change eg the Special Librarians Association in America describes itself as "an organisation of dynamic and change-oriented information professionals". In the US the current favourite attribute of analysts, employees and employers alike is flexibility. "Our ideal candidate is someone who has some computer skills but is well-rounded and has a great personality" according to IMB.

The remaking of librarians in the Knowledge Era organisations is more reliant than ever on people and their intellectual capital to add worth and create value. Knowledge is the new currency for exchange. Wealth and value for organisations is created by applying knowledge to knowledge. Marianne Broadbent writes, "Knowledge management is not about managing or organising books or journals, searching the Internet for clients or arranging for the circulation of materials. However, each of these activities can in some way be part of the knowledge management spectrum and processes". To secure a future, librarians will have to participate in knowledge management activities that create, capture, exchange, use and communicate the organisation's intellectual capital. Librarians will need to form new alliances eg between human resources, information technology and finance departments to develop new and innovative ways of creating the work environments where people choose to contribute. This means librarians will have to take on the characteristics of knowledge workers who are

- self-motivated and empowered
- enjoy an education premium (believe in life-long learning)
- undertake work characterised by variety and exception rather than routine
- collaborative
- team workers²

The Special Libraries Association in America has identified 24 professional and personal competencies which it believes that Special Librarians will require in the 21st century in order to make their role essential in the rapid social, technological transformations taking place in the workplace. I've selected a sample of 14 competencies:

- has expert knowledge of the content of information resources including the ability to critically evaluate and filter them;
- develops and manages convenient, accessible and cost-effective information services that are aligned with the strategic direction of the organisation;
- assesses information needs and designs and markets value-added information services and products to meet identified needs;
- develops specialised information products for use inside and outside the organisation eg

- creates a database of inhouse documents such as reports, technical manuals or resource materials for special projects;
- creates searchable full-text document files;
 - creates a page on the World Wide Web for the organisation;
 - links the home page to other sites of interest;
 - evaluates the outcomes of information use and conducts research related to the solution of information management problems;
 - continually improves information services in response to changing needs;
 - is committed to service excellence eg seeks performance feedback, conducts regular user surveys, asks library users if they found the information to be relevant and of value;
 - seeks out challenges and sees new opportunities both inside and outside the library eg uses library-based knowledge and skills to solve a variety of information problems in a wide range of settings;
 - looks for partnerships and alliances eg with MIS professionals to optimise complimentary skills and knowledge; with other libraries, with other information services; with vendors; with researchers in faculties of library and information studies to conduct relevant and practical studies
 - has effective communication skills eg runs meetings effectively, presents ideas clearly and enthusiastically, writes clearly, uses plain language, requests feedback on communication skills and uses it for self-improvement;
 - works well with others in a team;
 - provides leadership ~ is committed to life-long learning and personal career planning;
 - is flexible and positive in a time of continuing change.

A major problem in the Knowledge Era will not be the lack of information but the overload of it. Our sector is changing so fast it is difficult to make a prediction about the future. Probably the key attribute of a Library and Information Sector employee will be the ability to keep on changing.

A new CPD sub-category of ALIA membership

ALIA has developed a new Continuing Professional Development kit for members. It involves a 3-year program of self-assessed development, which may include participation in ALIA committees, attendance at formal courses and other self-development activities. The concept is based on accreditation from a self-maintained recording system, with occasional auditing at national office and awarding of a certificate on the completion of 3-year programs. The background and history of this sub-category have been provided in issues of *in-Cite*.

The CPD sub-category is voluntary and is open to Associate and Technician Members. There is an annual fee in addition to the annual membership fee. Each year members reaffirm their CPD compliance on their membership renewal form. There is a prescribed 20 hours of CPD annually, with a total of 80 hours to be gained over each 3-year period. Members are required to maintain records of CPD activities and hours on the record sheet provided in *The ALIA Career Planning Kit* and are encouraged to maintain a CPD portfolio. Random audits will occur, but no member will be audited more than once every three years. CPD hours are gained from two areas - generic and LIS related - through a range of activities based on the Library and Information Sector: core knowledge, skills and attributes draft statement. (See

<http://www.alia.org.au/boe/policies/core.knowledge.html>).

ALIA does not accredit CPD activities or CPD providers but does provide *Guidelines for Selecting Continuing Professional Development* in the kit. In the first instance it is obvious that the education and training required will be life-long. There is no question that the Association will need to play a major part in influencing the continuation of the education process. This is essential because beyond the actual content segment, there will be a need to validate and certify the education/training undertaken.

Use of Assessment

To a large degree, maximum success in choosing a satisfying and lasting career will depend on how well you make a self-inventory by evaluating your skills, abilities and interests. Conducting an effective self-inventory is not an easy task. It is difficult since you have to examine your entire life's activities. It requires an individual reflective effort, as well as guidance from family, counsellors, mentors and teachers along with appropriate tests.

The information leaders of tomorrow will engage in continuous learning, keep a close eye on changes in their working environment and ensure that their competencies are up to date. In other words, they will undertake continuing professional development. There is clear evidence that continuing professional development combined with effective individual performance counts in job retention and career advancement for librarians. Only organisations and individuals who espouse continuing learning, development and renewal will survive and prosper.

Endnotes

¹ Marion Nicholson. "Leading the profession into the 21st century : library and information services education." Paper presented at ALIA Board of Education Forum, 7-8 October 1997.

² Marianne Broadbent. "The emerging phenomenon of knowledge management." *ALJ*, February 1997.

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