

Pro-Action for Change in Research Libraries

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The profession of librarianship and libraries themselves are on an evolutionary path, the future destination of which is not wholly clear. While academic libraries have changed significantly in recent years, we librarians are continuously questioning what further changes we need to make to best support research and higher education.

We accomplish our goals with our most important--and often our most costly--asset: people. This special issue of the *ARL Bimonthly Report* plots where research libraries are on their evolutionary path in terms of the changing demographics of the research library workforce; institutional actions, attitudes, and thinking about what we require of people working in research libraries; and how we deploy and reward those individuals.

Defining where we are now in terms of how we utilize our human resources is useful. By depicting the current situation, we can more vividly see both how far we have come and how far we have yet to go to meet our ideals. Much of what we can document about the use of human resources in research libraries comes from data collected annually by ARL. The longitudinal analyses of that data conducted and reported by Martha Kyrillidou, ARL, and Stanley Wilder, University of Rochester, provide an extraordinarily useful perspective from which we can better frame actions to lead libraries to a desired future.

The shaping of the future workforce--and the choices of strategic activities that this workforce will pursue--are important issues for all library staff, administrators, leaders, and human resource professionals to engage. All of the articles in this issue of *ARL* demonstrate the value of gaining a clear understanding of the impact that multiple changes have on the research library workforce. An understanding of these trends and an awareness of how they may evolve in the future are important tools for assessing and sharpening institutional and professional strategies for library recruitment, human resource deployment, and training.

In addition, however, to grasp more fully the implications of the complex changes occurring in the library workforce, we need to learn better how to apply "systems thinking," such as is described in the article by the University of Arizona's Michael Ray and manifested in the teamwork discussed in the article by Joan Lippincott of the Coalition for Networked Information. That is, we need to learn better how to view the entire enterprise of human resource management in the library as a single system--a system of interdependent parts that are considered together rather than as separate issues, functions, activities, and roles.

Jennifer James describes the skills necessary for "thinking in the future tense": perspective, pattern recognition, cultural knowledge (understanding the myths that undergird our daily lives in the workplace and society), flexibility, vision, energy, intelligence, and global values.¹ Research libraries strive to be flexible and innovative, while maintaining a sense of vision. A central question is, to use James's term, how can we avoid becoming "self-sealing cultures" --alone in the middle, but not in the heart, of the campus? We must learn the skills necessary to observe patterns in our organizations and in the profession. Without these skills we will not be able to view the whole as an interdependent system.

In a time when research libraries are responding to technological change, making difficult choices about resource reallocations, and accelerating recruitment, important efforts are also being made to change patterns that are no longer serving our institutional and professional missions. The library profession is pouring human and financial resources into programs that promote diverse representation and create

learning communities. In supporting such change, ARL libraries are exhibiting what organizational culture authority Edgar Schein describes as the three key elements of successful change agents: "credibility, clarity of vision, and the ability to articulate the vision."² It is the exercise of these qualities that will allow libraries to proactively transform the ways in which they recruit, deploy, and train their workforces to anticipate and meet the needs of current and future library users.

Endnotes

1. Jennifer James, *Thinking in the Future Tense* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).
 2. Edgar Schein, *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).
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