

The Academic Librarian as the Missing Link: Sustainable leadership and the discipline of librarianship for a 21st century profession

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Abstract:

This paper addresses all four conference themes by focusing on the critical topic of the professional practice knowledge, skills, and abilities for the 21st century academic librarian. Drawing on the results of national human resources research studies completed for the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), this paper asserts that sustaining and growing the environment of academic librarianship, through sustainable resources, technology, and services can only be successfully achieved through effective leadership and sustainable workforce strategies at the individual, the institutional, and the sector level.

Selected aspects of two national Canadian workforce studies (the original *8Rs Study* from 2005 and the *8Rs Redux Study* of 2015) will be discussed in terms of proposing what is needed to sustain the academic librarian in the dynamic information environment in which 21st century academic libraries operate.

As the academic library environment progressively demands new librarian roles, and challenges a generally younger workforce, how will library leaders and the profession generally respond to ensure the continuation of a viable and sustainable discipline of librarianship and a positive future for academic libraries worldwide?

Overview

This paper, while featured in the service sustainability theme for The Academic Librarian 4 conference, has implications across all four conference theme areas of sustainable environment, resources, technologies, and services.

Librarianship as practiced in an academic setting is all about people, and often our professional literature and our focus naturally turns to the people who use the academic library. That is, the library client and their needs and requirements for collections, facilities, and services. Indeed, that approach is strongly reflected in the conference streams. However, across all of these areas there is a hidden ingredient, namely the library workforce in general and the academic librarian in particular.

This paper is focused on that hidden ingredient, namely the academic librarian in the context of the academic library workforce and the academic library as a workplace. It ranges across a number of topics and aims to set into context the professional practice of the academic librarian as it unfolds in the academic library workplace. Broadly, the paper is presented in four parts as follows:

- Academic librarian - constructs and framework
- What recent Canadian workforce research is telling us
- What does all this mean?
- What the future might hold

Central to discussion of the academic librarian now and in the future is the construct of the library workforce and the academic librarian's place on that workforce context. It is appropriate

to be having this discussion at a conference which is taking place in Hong Kong in June 2016 for two historic reasons.

Firstly, the inaugural conference in this series was held almost a decade ago in April 2007, when *The Academic Librarian: Dinosaur or Phoenix?: Die or fly in library change management*, was held at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Back then, the conference organizer likely did not realize that their conference topic would capture attention at the level to sustain a series of conferences, with this one being the fourth in the series.

At the official launch of the conference, Professor Liu Pak Wai, Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the host institution said (*The Academic Librarian: Dinosaur or Phoenix?: Die or fly in library change management*, 2007, p. 2):

In today's competitive environment, only the fittest will survive....The dinosaur has been extinct for millions of years because of its failure to adapt to a new environment. On the other hand, the phoenix, though mythical, stands as a symbol of how we might regenerate from ashes and become immortal and invincible. To be successful, it is critical for any organization to adapt and change proactively to the demands of any new environment. Libraries are no exception.

Secondly, it is historically significant that it is Hong Kong that has been the host venue for all four conferences. After all, today Hong Kong is a vibrant metropolitan gateway to China and it typifies that capacity for regeneration, which Professor Liu identified. Just as it has taken innovation and leadership for Hong Kong to sustain its uniqueness, over the years it has taken innovation and leadership to deliver on a forward looking conference program; and to develop this conference as a venue for international thought, conversation, and reflection about the role of the academic librarian and the practice of professional skills in librarianship within an academic setting.

Finally, I would contend that it takes innovation and leadership to continue to evolve the professional practice of the academic librarian in an ever-changing and dynamic information environment. Taking the sub-themes of innovation and leadership, this paper offers thoughts and opinions about what it will take to sustain innovation and leadership within the profession of librarianship, especially in academic settings.

The Academic Librarian – Constructs and Framework

Academic librarianship places the professional practice of the academic librarian firmly into the broader context of The Academy and into the workplace of the academic institution where the practice of professional skills takes place. That professional practice is influenced by many local, national, and global factors, internal and external to the profession, the home institution, and post-secondary education more broadly.

Too often discussions and analysis about the role and professional practice of the academic librarian (at least in the North American context) is sidetracked by the perennial debate about whether or not the academic librarian should be afforded academic or faculty status. Indeed, much has been written on this topic and while that broad issue is beyond the scope and focus of

this paper, this seems yet another occasion where the words of the late (and great) Donald E. Riggs holds true. In 1999, when offering advice to students planning to become an academic librarian, Riggs suggested: *If they do not want the responsibilities that go with faculty status, they should look for employment in an academic setting that does not require such* (Riggs, 1999, p 3). Put simply, if you cannot stand the heat in the kitchen, then find a room in the house more suited to your needs!

Placing the work of the academic librarian into an institutional context offers a helpful construct and framework for understanding the role and work of the academic librarian. The *University of Saskatchewan (U of S) Standards for Promotion and Tenure* (2002) is one example of how the professional practice work of the academic librarian is aligned with the standards expected of all faculty across the institution, with the work of the academic librarian being guided by a rigorous set of institutional and college academic standards. Librarians at the U of S have “*arguably the most demanding standards for research among academic libraries in Canada*” and “*the University Library at the University of Saskatchewan is at the forefront of national research leadership in academic librarianship.*” (Schrader, Shiri, and Williamson, 2012 p 150).

Firstly, the university and library standards acknowledges three principles by which the academic librarian must govern one’s self: autonomy, quality, and accountability with decision making needing to take account of these three principles. At the U of S, academic disciplines also have college/departmental standards that must align with those of the university. *The University Library Standards for Promotion and Tenure* (2015) clearly articulate the work of the academic librarian, adding that as librarians we also embody the core values and competencies outlined by our professional associations and local documentation, including the values statement within our strategic plan. The academic librarian embodies a set of core values into professional practice, inclusive of not just the values of librarianship but also the values of our respective institutions. At the U of S our values are laid out in the strategic plan and state that as members of the University Library, in working with each other and our community we: (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.)

- Are honest, supportive and sensitive in our communications
- Respect and value individual and cultural differences
- Support innovation, creativity and risk-taking
- Learn from our failures
- Celebrate our successes
- Are fair and forthright in our dealings
- Confront problems and issues openly and directly
- Cultivate an environment of collegiality and trust
- Ensure the protection of privacy and the right to confidentiality
- Uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources

Beyond initial academic qualifications, the academic librarian is expected to develop academically and professionally across five areas, with expectations, as assessed through collegial processes and the judgement of one’s peers, increasing as the academic librarian moves through the academic ranks of assistant librarian, associate librarian, and librarian. The five areas for development are:

- Teaching ability and performance
- Knowledge of the discipline and field of specialization
- Practice of professional skills, inclusive of professional practice, and research, scholarly and artistic work
- Contributions to the administrative or outreach responsibilities of the library, the university or both
- Public service and contributions to academic and professional bodies

Typically academic standing is recognized through academic and/or professional credentials. Across North America, the credential is a Masters of Library and Information Studies from a program accredited by the American Library Association (ALA), Committee on Accreditation (COA). Currently, COA accredits 64 programs at 59 institutions in 33 US states (including Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico) and 5 Canadian provinces. Of the 64 accredited programs, 29 are online programs, 2 with candidacy status, bringing a total number of students enrolled in ALA-accredited programs in fall 2014 to 15,197. In the 2013-14 academic year, graduates from ALA-accredited programs numbered 6,735 (ALA, 2015).

The role of the academic librarian as teacher signals to membership of The Academy that teaching ability and performance has become a core dimension of the work of the academic librarian. At the U of S, “*good teaching is expected of all librarians for whom teaching is an assigned duty*” and evaluation of teaching forms “*an essential component of tenure and promotion considerations*” (*University Library Standards for Promotion and Tenure*, 2015, pp 5-6). As a teacher, the academic librarian is expected to demonstrate knowledge of assigned area(s) and mastery of the discipline of information literacy, to make thorough preparations for their classes, to communicate effectively with their students, to show a willingness to respond to students’ questions and concerns, and to exhibit fairness in evaluating students.

The academic librarian, beyond entry level into the profession, is expected to develop a field of specialization and/or an area of focus, taking account of the breadth of their work and making evident their knowledge. Ways of doing this might include, but not be limited to, such things as offices held in professional organizations; membership of editorial boards; organization of conferences; peer review activities for journals in the discipline, etc.

The practice of professional skills is a large and quintessential component of the work of the academic librarian and is composed of two major components, those being firstly, professional practice, which may range across but not be limited to six categories; and secondly, research, scholarly and artistic work that is expected of the academic librarian. At the U of S, the practice of professional skills includes the demonstration of competency in librarianship (application) and the sharing of the knowledge gained through such application within forums where such knowledge is subject to the scrutiny and assessment of one’s peers (scholarship).

Professional practice means performance of the professional skills associated with librarianship and their effective use in the University Library. The academic librarian’s responsibilities and duties may range over one or more, but not necessarily all of the following:

- (a) Collections: developing, organizing, and managing library, archival, and gift collections through selection and deselection, acquisition, evaluation, licensing, and preservation of

- print and/or digital materials; digitizing, creating, and/or curating digital collections; ensuring physical and intellectual access to library collections and to scholarly information resources; creating and/or managing metadata; maintaining awareness of current and emerging strategies and technologies in order to inform collections-related practices; consulting with donors, faculty and the wider university community as appropriate; establishing and/or implementing policies and procedures for the above.
- (b) Training and instruction: engaging in instructional activity that may include workshops, orientations, information sessions, staff training, etc.
 - (c) Information services: supporting the needs of learners, practitioners, and, researchers by providing point of need and in-depth reference and research assistance; maintaining awareness of and promoting current research tools; providing publishing support for scholars; maintaining awareness of and addressing established and developing user needs; creating curriculum, subject and/or course support tools and resources.
 - (d) Systems and technology: planning, developing and implementing technology to enhance library services and access to information; supporting technology solutions for users and library employees; using technology innovatively in a library setting; maintaining awareness of and engaging with technology systems and services across campus; establishing and/or implementing policies and procedures for the above.
 - (e) Leadership and/or management: overseeing library functions, programs, projects and/or personnel, including planning, implementing, assessing, and staff training and development; participating in library planning processes; maintaining awareness of emerging trends in academic libraries; establishing and/or implementing policies and procedures for the above.
 - (f) Outreach and engagement: building relationships and/or partnerships external to the library to develop, implement, and manage services, address user needs, and/or promote the library.

Interlinked with the above six areas of professional practice, the academic librarian, as they progress through the academic ranks, is expected to progressively demonstrate the integration of professional characteristics/elements. The academic librarian:

- Establishes effective relationships and communications with colleagues, users, resource people, and collaborators
- Serves as an effective professional role model
- Receives peer recognition
- Demonstrates leadership within librarianship and within the library in order to advance library and institutional goals and objectives
- Delivers services effectively by making well-informed professional decisions, engaging in problem solving, and working innovatively
- Demonstrates flexibility and adaptability to work effectively in complex and/or changing assignments
- Gathers, synthesizes, analyses, and presents information thoroughly and accurately for professional purposes
- Organizes and manages complex multi-faceted and large-scale programs and/or projects
- Engages in lifelong learning to foster continuous professional development and improvement

Research, scholarly, and/or artistic work is the second but equal component of the practice of professional skills. At the U of S it is defined as “*creative, intellectual work which is in the public realm and which has been shared with other members of the professional and the academic community*”. The academic librarian is expected to develop a “*cohesive and sustained program*” and publish in “*reputable peer-reviewed outlets*” (*University Library Standards for Promotion and Tenure*, 2015, p. 12).

The academic librarian’s research, scholarly, and/or artistic work may be undertaken individually or collaboratively in one or more of three areas, as follows:

- Applied: investigations of the practice within the library environment
- Subject: research in the literature of specific disciplines
- Theoretical/policy: exploration of issues leading to the development of theory, policy, and/or standards of practice

Contributions to the administrative or outreach responsibilities of the library, university, or both involves the academic librarian’s commitment to the collegium and reflects service within and outside the university community. The academic librarian is expected to be actively engaged in the collegial decision-making processes, to participate in administrative work, and the activities of academic and professional organizations. Examples of such work may include committee work; advising on, developing, and managing projects, etc.

Public Service and contributions to academic and professional bodies is the academic librarian’s commitment to the broader university community and the general public. This may involve the academic librarian in public service (extending the librarian’s expertise to the community outside of the library) and/or contributions and service to academic professional or scientific organizations.

What recent Canadian workforce research is telling us

If the constructs and framework outlined above sets the context for the work of the academic librarian, then what is recent Canadian workforce research telling us about the overall workforce characteristics and the strategic human resources planning implications for the academic librarian working in a Canadian research library? Might those findings be applicable across the academic library sector more broadly?

Major workforce research has been undertaken in Canada twice over the decade spanning 2003 to 2013, with major research reports published in 2005 and 2015. The first comprehensive national Canadian library workforce study, entitled *The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries* (The 8Rs Team, 2005), is more commonly referred to and known as the *8Rs Study*, because the findings were related to eight human resource topics, all beginning with the letter ‘R’. It was ground breaking research and formidable in its size (it took over three years to complete), diverse in its coverage (it surveyed over 2,200 librarians and nearly 2,000 paraprofessionals, undertook in-depth interviews with library administrators, and focus group sessions), and comprehensive in scope (all types of libraries were included). It yielded a final report covering some 175 pages which revealed workforce data, characteristics, and trends that, until its publication in 2005, had never been systematically investigated. That original 8Rs research was, in part, driven by fears about the impact of an aging workforce.

A decade on from that original 8Rs Study, the *8Rs Redux Study* (DeLong, Sorensen, and Williamson, 2015) provides academic library sector and longitudinal workforce data for the academic and research libraries that are members of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL). The study reports changes in some of the original “Rs” (especially around retirements and recruitment) as well as identifying a new “R” workforce characteristic of ‘role change’. Above all, the *8Rs Redux Study* tells us that for the CARL libraries’ workforce, retirement, alongside of hiring of younger librarians and the restructuring of some roles and the attrition of others, has resulted in a noteworthy turnover of CARL library staff and a slightly larger and younger librarian workforce, many of whom are learning more new tasks in challenging and interesting roles that increasingly encompass specialized skills and that engender comparatively high levels of job satisfaction. The CARL workforce numbers approximately 6,500 and so the findings of this workforce research is not insignificant when considering the overall concept of the academic librarian.

In a February 2015 unpublished and interim summary of major finding and strategic human resources planning implications prepared for CARL member deans/directors, the following broad staff characteristics were reported to a meeting of CARL deans/directors: (DeLong, Sorensen, and Williamson, February, 2015 p. viii):

- Librarians comprised a slightly smaller share of CARL’s staffing complement than they did a decade earlier (down from 56% to 52%)
- Overall numbers of librarians has increased since the original study a decade earlier (up 3%)
- Other professionals comprise a slightly larger share of all staff (up from 9% to 14%) and grew by 72%
- Librarians are twice as likely to be members of visible minorities than 10 years ago (11% compared to 5%)
- Librarians continue to be predominantly female (comprising about 7 in 10 librarians)
- The gender profile of other professionals has shifted from being predominately female a decade earlier (51%) to predominately male (56%)
- Librarians are younger now than a decade ago; however, all types of staff are still older than the average for the Canadian workforce
- Librarians, especially female librarians, are less likely to be working in middle management than a decade ago
- In the decade between the two studies, nearly one-third of retiring librarian positions were not replaced
- Gender parity in senior administrative positions has been achieved, noting a decade ago males were more likely than female librarians to be working in senior administrative positions (22% compared to 12%) then and 15% of both male and female librarians now.

In broad terms, the following strategic human resource planning implications derived from the study and especially from the staff characteristics were also reported (DeLong, Sorensen, and Williamson, 2015, p. 3-4):

- The CARL workforce has become more diverse: there has been an influx of younger professionals (both librarians and other professionals), growth in the number of other

professionals, and larger numbers of new staff who represent visible minorities. Care must be taken to assess the growth and development requirements of newer staff and CARL organizational cultures and structures must be open and receptive to their presence and their need.

- Much of the cohort of newer librarians is still clustered at a non-managerial career stage. Their career aspirations need to be ascertained and appropriately developed, and training provided as these librarians will likely continue to be the face of CARL librarianship for the next thirty to forty years.
- Over the last ten years, there is some indication that a greater proportion of male than female librarians have reached middle-management levels in terms of career stage, acknowledging also that middle-management positions have decreased over the same period. CARL institutions need to assess interest in, and potential for, performing in management and leadership roles and ensure that opportunities for advancement is provided on an equitable basis.

While the workforce data from the study is both robust and reliable and gives a firm basis on which to undertake workforce planning, at the same time we are hearing some anecdotal and mixed messages about careers in academic librarianship. For those with human resources and library leadership responsibilities, these messaging can be confusing. So often these days messaging tells us that this is an exciting time to be embarking on a career as an academic librarian. However, there is other messaging saying almost the exact opposite – that is, these are some of the most challenging times for libraries, that stress in the workplace is on the rise, and maybe the academic librarian (like the libraries where they work) is becoming obsolete. Is the academic librarian at crisis point?

A detailed discussion of the workforce characteristics of the academic library as they were highlighted by the Canadian workforce research is beyond the scope of this paper and these areas are well outlined in the final report of the *8Rs Redux Study*. The focus going forward needs to be on action, plans, and strategies for growing the academic library workforce, with particular reference to the academic librarian of the future.

What does all this mean?

Evidence from both anecdotal and research sources therefore suggests the concept of the academic librarian is continually changing and all aspects of the role/work of the academic librarian continues to be under challenge. Taking all of what we know, the question is then what does all this mean for the future of the academic librarian, and what should we be doing to ensure a viable, relevant, and dynamic future for the academic librarian? Part of the answer lies in not leaving our future to chance or for others to determine; but being proactive at the individual, institutional, and sector-wide levels to grow the profession, evolve the practice of professional skills, and, actively plan and educate the academic library workforce.

Growing the profession together needs to happen simultaneously at several layers and levels. A framework for action at the individual, institutional, and sector-wide levels will help to ensure a workforce that is healthy, vibrant, relevant, and resilient – one that delivers a workplace culture that is comfortable with change, and, open to creativity and innovation in professional practice.

Or as Professor Liu would say: *To be successful, it is critical for any organization to adapt and change proactively to the demands of any new environment. Libraries are no exception.*

For the individual academic librarian, adaptation would require the academic librarian to be:

- A reflective practitioner
- Skilled in core methodologies of librarianship
- Committed to life-long learning and ongoing professional development
- Confident with new and emerging technologies
- An able communicator

For libraries, adaptation would require library workplaces to be:

- Strategically planning workforce development
- Aligning people resources with strategic directions
- Fostering leadership in professional practice
- Developing and sustaining a positive workplace culture with high levels of employee engagement through the various phases of the employee life-cycle
- Providing a systematic and ongoing program supporting lifelong learning, professional development and job training
- Making evidence based decisions

It is perhaps adaptation at the sector-wide level (be it at the national and/or international level) that is most problematic and possibly the most challenging to imagine and organize going forward. This is where the experiences of the Canadian research libraries sector (through CARL) might help to inform strategy development at the sector-wide level.

Over the decade from 2005 to 2015, CARL has been building the capacity and capability of the CARL workforce, through systematic, coordinated, and strategic initiatives at the national and sector-wide level. It is not serendipitous that this timeframe is bookended by the two national human resource research studies.

Key CARL milestones during the 10-year period include:

- 2005: Publication of the 8Rs research (*The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries*, 2005)
- 2006: Commissioning of a report outlining considerations for CARL of the 8Rs Study (Whitmell, May 2006).
- 2006: Publication by CARL of a training gaps analysis for librarians and library technicians (8Rs Research Team, 2006) and submission of the analysis by CARL to the Cultural Human Resources Council
- June 20, 2006 – CARL formally meets with the members of the Canadian Council for Information Science (CCIS) to discuss opportunities for on-going co-operation between the faculties of library and information science and Canada's research libraries and to identify some areas of mutual interest worthy of further exploration. This meeting was pivotal to CARL's future decision to establish the Education Working Group (EWG).

- November 2006 – CARL deans/directors, at their fall meeting in Vancouver and as a follow-up to the meeting with CCIS, formally established the mandate and terms of reference for the EWG.
- From 2006 until 2008 – the EWG spearheaded the development of the CARL Research and Education Agendas. EWG Outputs were:
 - Library Education Working Group: Final Report to the CARL Board of Directors
 - The report contained 17 recommendations for CARL to progress research agenda and an educational agenda both of which I will return to shortly.
 - Research Competencies Course for Librarians of CARL Member Institutions: Request for Proposals
 - This was originally developed by the 8Rs Team at the request of the EWG as a product brief intended to elicit responses for a program of research skills training from Canadian schools of library and information science. When, for a variety of reasons that approach did not progress, that competencies profile work was then published by CARL as: Core Competencies for 21st century CARL librarians (2010) and made available as a guide to good practice for CARL deans/directors. It has been used extensively in a variety of HR processes within individual CARL libraries ever since.
 - A survey of hot-topics occupying the time and focus of CARL deans/directors was also undertaken. (Lamothe and Williamson, 2008)
 - The EWG Report (2008) recommended the establishment of a CARL Research Agenda and a CARL Education Agenda
 - The goal of the CARL National Research Agenda was to:
 1. Determine research priorities in CARL libraries and identify priorities where collaborative research is possible or needed.
 2. Develop skills and competencies in research methodologies among librarians working in CARL libraries.
 3. Develop a repository of current and ongoing library and information service (LIS) research that will support its dissemination and use.
 - The CARL Education Agenda envisaged a focus on activities to ensure that LIS students are both prepared for and interested in pursuing careers in CARL libraries. Back then CARL considered it important to work with Canada's LIS programs to prepare students for academic library careers. To this end, the group recommended the formalization of relations between CARL and CCIS, the development of co-operative and internship programs for LIS students in CARL libraries, the development of Scholars-in-Residence programs for LIS faculty in CARL libraries (similar to the one in place at the University of Saskatchewan Library), and the development of a profile that will identify skills and competencies needed by academic librarians. The group also recommended the development of a CARL position statement that outlined the expectation for

continued professional development and lifelong learning for those working in academic libraries.

- May 2008: The EWG Report was endorsed by the CARL Board, which resolved (Board 19/E – 2008) to extend the mandate of EWG to begin the oversight of the implementation of the actions designed to progress both the research and education agendas. A new strategic plan and a review of CARL committee structures ended the EWG mandate and oversight then passed to the “Building Capacity” Subcommittee and eventually to the Transforming Research Libraries Committee. Some actions evolved, others fell off the wagon; and, other new ideas and projects emerged.
- 2008: National Human Resources Summit – because of the work of EWG, CARL deans/directors went to the summit with some clear agenda items and an interest from within CARL to move forward with collaborative action.
- Beyond 2008 onwards: CARL’s Transforming Resources Libraries (TRL) committee continued a focus on workforce and HR issues, with several specific individual CARL deans/directors making significant contributions through investing their time, energy and lending their voice to advocating about the importance for CARL to build workforce capability and capacity through national sector-wide action.
- 2008 – 2015: The Transforming Research Libraries Committee has provided leadership and coordination and overseen the development (and institutionalization as a core CARL activity) the following:
 - Librarians’ Research Institute (LRI) through five iterations of the program
 - CARL Research Grants, which have been awarded annually for the past 8 years to librarians to undertake research projects. The CARL website provides background information and a list of past recipients: <http://carl-abrc.ca/en/research-libraries/grants.html>.
- 2015: *8R’s Redux Study* published; development of CARL’s strategic directions 2016-2019, including the goal that CARL will foster development of expertise and capacity for new and emerging roles; and, support workforce development and renewal through initiatives relating to strategic recruitment, leadership and management development, and diversity.
- 2016: Realignment of CARL committees with the stated strategic directions, including the establishment of the CARL Capacity Committee to focus on advancing CARL’s strategic goal ‘Strengthening Capacity.’ The Capacity Committee develops CARL’s priorities and activities to effectively promote CARL’s role and efforts in these areas and to ensure that CARL members can support staff development and growth. Beyond workforce capacity, the Committee will also consider financial, technical, or physical capacity issues when they are deemed to merit CARL members’ attention or collaboration on a national basis. Specifically, the Capacity Committee will advance CARL’s Strategic Directions; develop new collaborations between libraries and other research organizations that will lead to strengthened capacity among CARL libraries;

identify the competencies for new and emerging roles to support the changes in teaching, learning and research; develop strategies and programs that will foster the development of new competencies and help members to address resource management issues through evidence-based approaches, fostering leadership and providing a forum to exchange best practices.

In establishing the Capacity Committee, CARL has recognised that the “research libraries’ workforce, just like their physical facilities, collections, and services, must evolve to keep pace with changes in education and research brought about by digital technologies and socio-economic factors. CARL represents and actively supports the many new and expanded roles for research libraries identified by its members”. Indeed, CARL’s Strategic Directions 2016-2019 state that:

As changes in research, teaching, and learning continue to accelerate, Canada’s research libraries are evolving to include a wider variety of expertise and professional backgrounds in their workforce. CARL provides a forum to explore and advance leadership and workforce development so that its member libraries are leaders within their institutions.

Through a decade of work, CARL has learned much and achieved positive outcomes for the academic librarian and the academic library workforce. Much has been achieved and the majority of the national co-ordination work required has been mainstreamed into the ongoing work of CARL. There is a renewed willingness and focus on the part of CARL deans/directors strongly reflected in their strategic directions statement to continue to engage with HR issues – issues related to growing capacity and working in partnership with others.

A similar commitment is emerging with the work currently underway within the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). ARL’s focus on library human resources through its 2012 Fall Forum program; the ARL-ACRL Human Resources Symposium in 2012; and its Workforce Transformation Stories are example of ARL’s focus and sector-wide coordination. These are positive and encouraging signs indeed for the future of the academic librarian and the evolution of the professional practice of the academic librarian and for the academic library workplace (ARL, 2015).

What the future might hold

The *8Rs Redux Study* in particular and the Canadian research libraries sector focus through CARL provides a helpful framework across areas through which the role/work of the academic librarian might evolve. It also offers the global academic library profession avenues through which collaborative capacity building might emerge. Overall, this paper asserts that sustaining and growing the environment of academic librarianship, through sustainable resources, technology, and services can only be successfully achieved through effective leadership and sustainable workforce strategies at the individual, institutional and sector-wide levels focused on the academic librarian.

As the academic library environment progressively demands new librarian roles, and challenges a generally younger workforce, how will library leaders and the profession generally respond to ensure the continuation of a viable and sustainable discipline of librarianship and a positive

future for academic libraries worldwide? The answer to this question is by exploiting the missing link. That is, by focusing on the academic librarian and through sustainable leadership moving the discipline of academic librarianship ever forward.

In undertaking the *8Rs Redux Study* it certainly was our wish going forward that the findings of this latest study, especially the advice offered in the strategic HR planning implications section of the report, which is so strongly evidence-based, will inform HR and workforce planning not only at the local level but where appropriate at the national and international level as well.

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