Human resource challenges for Canadian research libraries

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Leadership for the library and information profession
As libraries across the world transform their facilities, services and resources in response to challenging and changing circumstances, economically demanding conditions and increasing competition from other information suppliers, the topic of leadership for the library and information services (LIS) profession is gaining increasing attention. For example, in 2008 the editors of *Library and Information Sciences Research* suggested that "as libraries engage in change management and transforming the organization to meet the challenges and opportunities presented in the near future, including greater interaction with different stakeholders, leadership will only become a more important topic."[i] They went on to suggest the LIS literature would benefit from an increased focus on managerial leadership and how it functions in practice, and that such a focus could lead to a new journal or annual publication in LIS.

Specialist conferences on library human resource issues, including leadership for the library and information profession, are on the increase and attracting sufficient participants to make them viable. For example, in Hong Kong in April 2007, participants from several countries met to focus on the future of the academic librarian (*The Academic Librarian: Dinosaur or Phoenix? Die or Fly in Library Change Management*[ii]). Interest from that conference continues and a second conference on the same topic is planned in Hong Kong for March 2010 (*Singing in the Rain*).[iii] In October 2009, Australian colleagues will host a significant new conference to focus on library human resource issues, which includes a theme on 'leadership development' (*People in the Information Profession).*[iv]

Specialist research is also informing discussions and actions. In Canada, in 2005, groundbreaking research was published about Canadian libraries and the people who work in them. Similar research was subsequently initiated in the United States.[v] The human resource issues identified by the Canadian research continues to stimulate professional debate and has led to the implementation of some actions across the research library sector and as well as within individual libraries.

Canadian experience
The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries[vi], also known as the 8Rs study, delivered workplace and demographic data about the characteristics of Canadian library personnel. The report focused on recruitment, retirement, retention, remuneration, repatriation, rejuvenation, re-accreditation and restructuring within Canadian Libraries – hence its short title: the 8Rs study.

The publication was the culmination of nearly three years of research, which included a survey of 461 library administrators and human resource managers, a survey of over 2,200 librarians and nearly 2,000 paraprofessionals (non-MLIS staff, excluding library clerks), in-depth telephone interviews with 17 library administrators, and 3 focus group

sessions. An extensive literature review and analyses of existing data was also included in the publication.

The findings from the 8Rs study are many and varied and the core challenge for Canadian librarians and other stakeholders remains how to respond to the findings and what action is appropriate to take. Since the publication of the 8Rs study, Canadian librarians and other stakeholders have continued discussions while some individual institutions and groups have developed strategies to address some of the issues raised by the study.

Canadian research libraries
The 8Rs study found among other things, that the possession of management skills and leadership potential are two of the most important and difficult to fulfill competencies. Also, when senior librarians retire, leadership skills were more difficult to replace than general skills and knowledge, and an even greater concern is expressed over the ability to replace leadership skills in the future.

The Canadian research libraries sector, through its professional association, commissioned its own follow-up work to extrapolate data from the 8Rs study which was relevant to the member libraries within the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL). In its membership, CARL includes 30 Canadian university research libraries, the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI), Library and Archives Canada and the Library of Parliament.

The *Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries,* 'The 8Rs study'*: Considerations for the Canadian Association of Research Libraries*[vii] provided CARL Directors with sector specific information. It also highlighted that the CARL libraries,
- have a significant number of staff retiring in the next few years,
- experience some difficulties in recruiting staff with competencies in leadership and management,
- have librarians who are less interested and feel less qualified than librarians in other sectors to take on management and supervisory responsibilities,
- provide adequate training in some areas but are less likely to provide training in leadership and management, and
- can expect a librarian shortage in the longer-term.

CARL took positive steps in 2006 and established its Library Education Working Group (LEWG) with a mandate to create relationships with those interested in library education and research, outline the next steps for taking identified priorities forward, identify actions arising from the recommendations of the 8Rs Report and make recommendations to the CARL Board. The LEWG *Final Report to the CARL Board of Directors*, including 17 recommendations for action, was presented in May 2008.[viii]

National HR summit
Immediately after the publication of the *8Rs study*, the Canadian Library Association (CLA) established its President's Council to raise the awareness of the 8Rs report data and of its implications. The CLA followed-up the work of its President's Council in October 2008, by convening an invitation-only summit in the nation's capital, Ottawa. The *National Summit on Library Human Resources* focused on key issues that present challenges to the library community in the areas of recruitment and education. A significant contingent of CARL Directors attended the summit, which included over 100

representatives from national and regional associations, employersfrom research, public and special libraries, unions, government officials, educators, and other stakeholders in the Canadian library community. The *National Summit on Library Human Resources: Report for the Canadian Library Association*[ix] serves as a record of the meeting, and is also a guide for the Canadian library profession in carrying forward the process of developing action plans that address human resource challenges, including the challenge of leadership within Canadian libraries in the 21st Century.

The summit set out to identify promising strategies to help address the current and future human resource issues; identify the actions that participants and stakeholders may undertake to implement the strategies over the next 5-6 years; and determine how the library community can move forward in a coordinated and collaborate way. Emerging from the summit discussions some possible strategies and key actions were identified. These will need considerable follow-up action over the next 5 to 6 years to move towards the goal of ensuring an adequate supply of well-educated, well-trained librarians and information professionals in order to meet Canada's knowledge and information management needs in the first three decades of the 21st century.

The summit particularly focused on the 8Rs research findings about recruitment, leadership development and professional development. During the course of the two-day summit discussions, groups worked on these topics from the perspective of designing preliminary strategic models. Two groups worked specifically on strategies to address leadership development. The first group in this category proposed a plan to develop a bilingual competency-based leadership program, with personal, managerial and senior leadership representing the key elements of such a program, which would include experiential learning. Reviewing existing leadership programs (such as the Northern Exposure to Leadership) was suggested as a first step. The second group focused on leadership development proposed a plan to research what stakeholders and communities identify as key leadership competencies and develop leadership models and programs from these identified items

Moving a national collaborative agenda forward through national collaborative action was always going to be a leadership challenge in itself and while support remains high in some quarters for a nationally coordinated approach to strategy implementation, the number of concrete actions being pursued as a result of the summit discussions is low.

Meanwhile, some individual institutions, such as the University Library at the University of Saskatchewan, are implementing local strategies to address some of the HR issues identified in the 8Rs study and to build on the ideas articulated at the National HR Summit. For example, an in-house Library Leadership Development Program (LLDP) is underway at the University of Saskatchewan and a second Library Leader Institute was held in Ontario in May 2009.[x]

Library Leadership Development Program (LLDP)
At the University Library at the University of Saskatchewan, LLDP was conceptualised against the broad national context of Canadian libraries as highlighted through the *8Rs study* and the local context of the library strategic plan, using this definition. [xi]
Leadership at the University Library is being motivated to inspire others through ones' actions, behaviours and communication to influence them to pursue common goals or a vision, all for the common good. It is about creating hope and enthusiasm through shared values and beliefs.

At the University Library recruitment activities in recent year highlight some of the trends identified in the *8R's Study*, Such as difficulty with filling leadership positions. The Library Employee Opinion Survey conducted in 2006 and 2008 identified 'leadership' as a dimension of the organisational culture and performance needing improvement. Consequently, LLDP was conceived, not because of a lack of other leadership programs in North America, but rather in direct response to the identified national challenges and local conditions. LLDP is a local solution with national implications.

The first cohort of the LLDP comprising 2009 and will conclude in March 2010. A second cohort commenced in September 2009 and a third cohort is scheduled to commence in January 2010. By the conclusion of the third cohort, approximately 40% of library employees will have participated in LLDP.

The way LLDP is structured and delivered ensures learning takes place over a period of time; rather than an intensive one-off immersion approach. The structure reduces the resource impacts on the participants; provides time in between formal modules to reflect upon, practice and implement what has been learned; and, ensures time to complete reading or practical leadership assignments. Formal learning activities take place away from the workplace to reduce the opportunities for work-distractions and provide a different learning environment. Each module covers a theme, poses key questions, facilitates thematic discussions and provides an assessment tool. Modules cover leadership and relationship building; team building; leading change; performance planning and accountability; leadership and organisational culture; and, personal mastery and organisational effectiveness. In addition there are individual assignments and readings, trios for peer coaching and support, team leadership challenges back at work, application/information gathering/research on leadership and related topics and the opportunity to document learning by keeping a journal.

Progress is being monitored along the way with on-going evaluation and the overall success will be measured by several key performance indicators. An anonymous, online survey of participants who completed the first module showed that 94% of participants felt the learning objectives for the session were met; 77% felt the coaching session and practices provided them with practical techniques and tips for future coaching sessions; and, 65% felt overall the session provided them with an effective opportunity to begin their leadership learning journey.

Library Leaders Institute (LLI)
As it has evolved, the LLI has helped participants to explore their aspirations for leadership, focus and strengthen their personal and career goals, and develop concrete action plans to reach those goals. Vicki Whitmell, the founder of the LLI, which ran in 2006 and 2009, has indicated the idea of the institute came from her own personal need for a different kind of interaction, thinking and learning about leadership than was found at many general library conferences and professional development and training seminars. LLI developed as a place for leaders and aspiring leaders to rejuvenate and to meet and talk confidentially with others facing similar circumstances and issues. The format of the LLI allows time for in-depth discussions and conversations with others; not only to seek advice but to listen and to help each other as much as possible. The result has been that a significant number of the institute participants have moved into leadership positions and/or have made significant workplace and life changes based on their work and discussions with others at the institute.

Work-in-progress
Too often research sits on the shelf and does not inform the on-going development of our professional practice. However, in the case of the *8Rs study,* action is taking place on many of the key issues highlighted by the research. It is very much a case of a work-in-progress to address human resource challenges for Canadian research libraries.

[i] Hernon, Peter and Candy Schwartz. 2008. 'Leadership: developing a research agenda for academic libraries', *Library & Information Sciences Research*, 30:4, 243-249

[ii] *The Academic Librarian: Dinosaur or Phoenix? Die or Fly in Library Change Management*, http://www.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/conference/aldp2007/info/index.htm

[iii] *Academic Librarian 2: Singing in the Rain,* http://www.lib.polyu.edu.hk/ALSR2010/

[iv] *People in the Information Profession,* http://www.caval.edu.au/hrconference.html

[v] Griffiths, Jose-Marie and Don King. 2008. *The Future of Librarians in the Workforce*, Research Projects. School of Information and Library Science http://sils.unc.edu/research/projects.html

[vi] University of Alberta, 8Rs Research Team. 2005. 'The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries', *Canadian Library Human Resource Study* www.ls.ualberta.ca/8rs/8RsFutureofHRLibraries.pdf

[vii] Whitmell, Vicki. 2006. *The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries, 'the 8Rs Study': Considerations for the Canadian Association of Research Libraries.* Canadian Association of Research Libraries www.carl-abrc.ca/projects/scholarly_communication/pdf/8rs_v.whitmell_report_rev.pdf

[viii] Williamson, Vicki et al. 2008. *Library Education Working Group: Final Report to the CARL Board of Directors.* Canadian Association of Research Libraries http://www.carl-abrc.ca/about/working_groups/Reports/0802e_libeduwrk_report.pdf

[ix] *National Summit on Library Human Resources: Report for the Canadian Library Association (CLA),* Ottawa, ON; October 6-7, 2008: The Intersol Group, Feb 2009

[x] *Library Leaders Institute II,* http://www.whitmell.com/conference/leaders/index.htm

[xi] Williamson, Vicki. *Developing Leadership to Transform our Library: The Library Leadership Development Program (LLDP) at the University of Saskatchewan.* University of Saskatchewan Library http://ecommons.usask.ca/bitstream/handle/10388/286/Manuscript%20copyLLDP_revised.pdf?sequence=3