



SMR SPECIAL REPORT

PROSPECTS FOR SPECIALIZED LIBRARIES: COMMENTS FROM COLLEAGUES

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Knowledge services enables an enterprise-wide knowledge culture that ensures excellence in knowledge asset management, high-level research, enhanced contextual decision making, and accelerated innovation.

Knowledge services is the management and service delivery methodology that converges information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning. Its goal is enterprise-wide knowledge development and knowledge sharing (KD/KS), shaping and sustaining an organizational knowledge culture in which excellence in knowledge asset management, high-level research, enhanced contextual decision making, and accelerated innovation is assured.

The articles mentioned here are: "Toward World-Class Knowledge Services: Emerging Trends in Specialized Research Libraries," by Victoria Harriston, Thomas A. Pellizzi, and Guy St. Clair. *Information Outlook* 7 (6-7), June-July, 2003 (<http://www.smr-knowledge.com/publications.htm> and <http://www.smr-knowledge.com/articles/World%20Class%20Know%20Serv%20Customer%2007-01-03.pdf>) and "Knowledge Services: The Practical Side of Knowledge Management," by Dale Stanley and Guy St. Clair. *Information Outlook* 12 (6-7), June-July, 2008 (<http://www.smr-knowledge.com/articles/Know%20Services%20StC%20-%20Stanley.pdf>).

Five years ago, trends toward "world-class" knowledge services management and delivery were identified and described in a two-part article published in the magazine of the Special Libraries Association (SLA). This past summer, the same magazine published a two-part article asserting that knowledge services is the *practical* side of knowledge management and that information professionals use knowledge services to "put KM to work." As SLA approaches the 100th anniversary of its founding, it is appropriate to examine the role of specialized librarianship in the larger knowledge services environment and to identify and address the expectations of information professionals—many of them specialist librarians—who have responsibility for the management and delivery of knowledge services.

To this end, SMR International in the spring of 2008 sought informal input from some thirty people about the future of specialized librarianship. The impetus for the study was a collection of perceptions about specialized librarianship observed in a variety of situations and over a period of two decades (related to the growth of interest in knowledge management and the establishment of knowledge as an organizational asset). While no one of these perceptions—in and of itself—was particularly earth-shaking or disheartening, in combination they seemed to require further consideration. In particular, while

respecting the work done in the academy and in the various professional associations supporting library and information science (LIS) practitioners, it seemed worthwhile to take a look at the future of specialized librarianship in terms of the workplace and the expectations of workplace managers about the role of this particular branch of the LIS profession.

Perceptions About Specialized Librarianship

The services provided through the specialized library is not always recognized as connected to the larger LIS profession. Except for medicine and law, there appear to be misconceptions about the role of specialized librarianship in the workplace.

Among perceptions identified in recent years, several that might be connected to an interest in looking at management expectations (and proposed solutions) are fairly straightforward:

1. Specialized libraries are well thought of by users and clients who know about the services provided and who avail themselves of those services.
2. For management, the specialized library is often simply another operational function, a means to an end.
3. In the larger society, there is a sort of benevolent ignorance about specialized librarianship, but that changes when the expertise of the specialist librarian or other information professional resolves organizational issues (especially issues related to mission success).
4. Except for medicine and law, there appears to be little interest within the larger LIS profession in specialized librarianship. The subject is not always taught in LIS graduate programs (although it is sometimes included in general management-type courses), and the popular *U.S. News & World Report* annual listings of best graduate programs do not include specialized librarianship, except for health librarianship and law librarianship, with these being stand-alone categories and not designated as “special” libraries or as part of specialized librarianship.

An Emerging New Profession

The new working environment for specialist librarians and information professionals with similar skills might be referred to as “the knowledge services workplace.” It will be managed by information professionals providing information, knowledge, and strategic learning for non-library affiliated knowledge-centric organizations.

A related and very important issue has to do with the working environment in which specialist librarians are (or will be) employed. Indeed, it could be convincingly argued that the LIS profession has, over the past two decades or so, evolved into a profession for providing practitioners for public, academic, and school libraries and that a different workplace—what we might term the “knowledge services workplace”—is coming into being. The new working environment will be managed by information professionals who see themselves as knowledge thought leaders providing information, knowledge, and strategic learning support for non-library affiliated knowledge-centric organizations, businesses, or other types of research-focused environments. Their work continues and will continue to be that identified by the founders of SLA a century ago, to provide “practical and utilitarian information” and, as has been seen in the evolution of that work during the past 100 years, to transition into a knowledge leadership role as the parent enterprise embraces the knowledge culture demanded in today’s workplace.

It can be reasonably predicted that this new workplace for knowledge thought leaders will provide employment in a large (and continually growing) community of knowledge-centric organizations. While these organizations will not necessarily seek to include library services (as

The Demand for Knowledge Services

Regardless of what the functional workplace is called or whether those employed therein are required to have post-graduate education to do the work, the management and delivery of knowledge services will continue to be required by all knowledge-centric organizations.

The New Workplace

The work of knowledge thought leaders in the organization is no longer “library management.” The new workplace demands “research asset management” or “knowledge asset management.”

their managers understand library services) in their operational structure, they will require a huge body of employees with an LIS or LIS-type education, and they will come to value a research-focused background in their new hires. These employees will also be expected to possess the skills needed to liaise between and support the relationship between knowledge and technology, for they will be asked to analyze, synthesize, and interpret information, knowledge, and strategic learning as their employing organizations require those functions.

So while organizations (and society in general, it might be added) are experiencing a sea change in the management of information, knowledge, and strategic learning, specialized libraries themselves and the field of specialized librarianship are evolving. It is an evolution that is happening faster than many expected, and indeed many specialized libraries are now being thought of in their organizations in different terms, as research functional or business units instead of as libraries or information centers. Those with responsibility for the management and delivery of knowledge services are no longer thought of as being employed in “library management” or even in “specialized library management.” Their job now is characterized as “research asset management” or “knowledge asset management,” a designation that goes far in describing to non-LIS managers and enterprise leaders their true relationship with the organization’s larger mission.

Professional colleagues selected to participate in the present study were chosen because all of them are involved in the operational function of a specialized library or specialized library-like business unit. They agreed to share their thoughts, and their participation is much appreciated. It should be emphasized, though, that this was an *informal* study, since the questions were asked to provide background for a series of presentations and public speeches (the idea of sharing this information as an SMR International Special Report came later). Data-gathering was collected through conversations or e-mail exchanges (including several gratifying in-depth discussions).

As with the 2003 study (for which the investigators took a more formal approach), many of these managers speaking about their professional expectations asked that they be permitted to comment without attribution. This request was based on a variety of reasons. Some of the participants did not wish to deal with seeking permission from their corporate communications staff, others felt some personal awkwardness in speaking for attribution, and some respondents are information professionals involved in seeking changes in the formal education of librarians. Others commented that while they are aware of what needs to be done, they lack support in their parent organizations to bring about changes that they—as knowledge professionals—can identify and they are reluctant to appear to be “going public,” as it were. So while these selected knowledge services leaders agreed to contribute their thoughts about specialized

librarianship, their comments are necessarily their own and do not represent any organizational, institutional, or association affiliation.

Nevertheless, these people are leaders in their organizations who have management responsibilities with respect to some function like specialized librarianship where they are employed. Their education, experience, and professional role in their parent company's organizational effectiveness qualifies them to speak about knowledge services and its role in the larger organization. Many of those responding made it clear that they see themselves as being employed in the larger information or KM/knowledge services industry. While they express much affection and respect for the library and information science profession (in which most of them began their careers), some of those who participated do not see themselves in their current positions as working as librarians, particularly as that term is understood by much of the lay public and the organizational managers and leaders with whom they interact.

Challenges for Specialized Libraries

1. Relevance, Effectiveness, and the Role of the Information Professional in the Larger Organization
2. Collaboration (or "Marginalization Avoidance")
3. Service Delivery Value and the Measurement of Service Delivery
4. Adapting to Change and Change Management/Change Implementation
5. Efficiencies of Management
6. Staffing

The simple framework for the study consisted of seeking responses to two questions:

1. What do you think will be the top two or three challenges for specialized libraries in the next few years (probably best to think short-term rather than long-term)?
2. As an information professional working in the field, how do you expect to deal with these challenges?

Responses (challenges) fell into six categories, and for each of these, managers of specialized libraries (however defined) describe their perceptions, expectations, and offer recommendations relating to these challenges as follows. In some descriptions, direct quotations are included in the text, and in others, concepts and ideas offered by more than one participant are combined into a single response.

RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS AND THE ROLE OF THE INFORMATION PROFESSIONAL IN THE LARGER ORGANIZATION

The largest number of responses to the first question had to do with relevance. Managers expect the role of the information/knowledge/strategic learning function in the larger organization to match the strategic goals of the organization and they understand that they are expected to assess service delivery to ensure a successful match. It is a task they must undertake on an on-going basis, and they recognize it as part of their work. These managers understand that it is their job to make certain that the specialized library or library-like function is relevant, and several participants in the study commented that in their work they are "continually" asking themselves and the people with whom they work: "Does this task support enterprise values?" For many, it is of critical importance to be able to connect the strategic role of knowledge services delivery and its effectiveness with supporting mission-critical organizational activities.

Still, within specialized librarianship, there apparently continues to be much concern about how employees in the knowledge services functional unit are perceived, since that perception is recognized as affecting working relationships with others in the organization. For one industry manager, that perception can be changed through looking for opportunities to engage senior management, to identify sponsors not just as champions of the knowledge services functional unit but to ensure that managers who openly state their support of the work of the specialized library are also willing to express, model, and reinforce the work of the specialized library.

“We need champions high up in the organization,” this participant comments. “We need champions who understand the competitive edge that a library gives the company and who show their support by regularly making use of the services we provide.”

With regard to making sure organizations know the relevance of the specialized library, another colleague says, “I think senior library staff and managers need to have regular meetings up the food chain and keep offering their services. I constantly meet with my director so that we can talk about things I can help with. I communicate with my manager frequently as well, and give her my ideas on how the library can help the rest of the organization. Communication and forward thinking are the things that are relevant here. I am fortunate that (1) my manager and director are both innovative and forward-thinking and (2) they seem to value and respect my opinion and role. I therefore feel I have a seat at the table and I am able to offer input.”

One colleague makes it clear that for insuring the development of sponsors and champions (and other organizational managers), one technique is to look beyond the usual responsibilities of the specialized library, to seek cross-functional programs and projects that provide mutual benefit: “We need to take ownership of institutional knowledge and provide access to information across the organization. Instead of asking departments to share, we need to manage their information for them so that it is inherently shared with those who need to have access to it. Integrating contact databases, records management, commercial databases, and library holdings will provide a rich picture of what an organization knows both today and what organizational staff need to learn for tomorrow.”

Another approach for establishing and sustaining relevance is to move away from the “gate-keeper” model, to come up with ways to enable clients to do their own basic to mid-level information gathering. Such efforts then free knowledge professionals for concentrating on providing expertise and value to high-level requests and projects. One industry manager stresses that knowledge services staff should be involved in anything involving information analysis (e.g., higher level research and synthesis), organization (internal systems, portals, other technological innovations), and dissemination, pointing out that “senior

managers are not aware of the grounding librarians have, not just in finding information relevant to a particular request, but in everything surrounding information and knowledge management.”

Echoing this, another manager writes: “Virtual libraries, online subscriptions, and databases directly serving the end-user will continue to improve and become more widely available, so specialized libraries will have to work even harder to find their place in the information value chain. To my way of thinking, finding this place means moving up the value chain by providing value added services, information in context, and analysis, probably with existing personnel that many times is not qualified to do that. And it will be even harder to provide that value add if those libraries are not part of the core business and are therefore lacking important information regarding how to make their contribution more useful and relevant.”

Focusing on content is recognized as important in maintaining relevancy, as was noted in more than one case. “It isn't just about efficiency,” is how another participant put it. “The losses of making ill-informed decisions about knowledge asset management and service delivery are detrimental to the larger organization and we have to establish that we know that and take the position that we are there to correct problem situations. Of course it's all about content—about providing appropriate content—and that often mean figuring out how to provide alternative entrée to significant content as the costs of content escalate.”

For another manager, that connection with the larger organization is based on the picture the staff of the specialized library have of themselves and their role in the larger enterprise. “We must begin to think of ourselves as ‘library businessmen’ and ‘library businesswomen,’ this manager writes. “We’re involved in and exposed to business all our lives, from birth when we’re brought home from the hospital—which is a business—and we need to learn to operate within that framework.”

Transitioning into a business-like or enterprise-focused framework includes, of course, figuring out how to work with all levels of organizational staff and particularly with senior management, and several managers with knowledge services delivery responsibility have comments on that subject.

“One technique,” according to one manager of a specialized library, “is to devise good strategies to get the word to senior management that research is not the only thing we can do. Many times we're wedded to the L-word (librarian) when that might not be the right title to convey what we know. My title nowhere has the word librarian in it and many people in my organization, while they know I work for the library, don't know I am a librarian. Many also think I work for IS (Information Services) and not for the library. I tell people that I'm a librarian, not

because I'm intimately tied up with the term, but because I want people to know that librarians have skills that are relevant to technology.”

Another manager also spoke about the job title in the context of the library's relevance and effectiveness: “And yes,” this manager says, “I would get rid of the L word. I believe it is extremely hard to change the image that is attached to it and I see it more as a hindrance than something to build on.”

Other than these comments, though, there were no (or very limited) concerns about the word “library.” If the term is appropriate for the organizational culture or the institution for which the services are provided, the managers of the specialized libraries accept it as an appropriate designation and do not object to using it. If, on the other hand, another term such as “research department” or “knowledge asset management” is a better “fit” within the context of the parent organization, that is the terminology that is used and there is little objection there either.

COLLABORATION (OR “MARGINALIZATION AVOIDANCE”)

Closely connected to relevance and effectiveness is the need for cooperation, collaboration, and any other opportunities for working in tandem with non-knowledge services units and people. In this respect, it might appear that the strategic learning or knowledge sharing/ knowledge development (KD/KS) activities in the knowledge services picture would take precedence over information management and knowledge management, and that might be the case in some situations (although information management and knowledge management continue to be critical as the relationship between knowledge and technology strengthens).

One manager, for example, looks out into the larger enterprise and identifies important opportunities for the sharing of skills and techniques that are almost “built in” to the work of the specialized library or knowledge services functional unit: “I am concerned,” this manager writes, “that libraries and information professionals are undervalued by the upcoming generation of knowledge ‘needy.’ They have been so hard wired to receive data as part of the infrastructure (computers! smartphones! IM!) that they are unable to determine what is important, to be knowledgeable, and to make good decisions from the information glut of daily life. To keep from being marginalized, libraries must decentralize, integrate, live where users live, use what they use, and leverage organizational tools to help these people filter for knowledge creation. Of greater importance is relationship management, forming partnerships and becoming a part of the infrastructure to the extent that the information and knowledge staff become so established as to be indispensable, and to do this we must get on the social networking tools bandwagon. We have to get out of

our comfort zone and come up questions that are likely to be asked, before they are asked. Not only do we have to prove our financial worth, we must add value to our services. We can no longer rely on being the gate-keepers to unique sources of information because we are not playing that role any longer.”

Yet even before the specialist librarians and other knowledge workers go to the people “on the floor,” so to speak, they must establish a collaborative framework with the information technology specialists. Another colleague says that “first and foremost, collaboration with ‘the engineers’ is essential, and we must make efforts to bring these two supposed ‘different’ workgroups together. We must bring information services/information technology specialists and content managers/knowledge managers/specialist librarians to the table together.”

In this manager’s opinion, “this is possibly the most critical of all the challenges we face today, not just working with the engineers, but to work at forging a *relationship* with the people in information technology. In my organization, the library is housed within IS (and in our organization, IS stands for Information Services, not Systems). We, the librarians need to have enough ‘soft’ tech skills so that we can effectively communicate our issues to IS, so that we can work together to solve problems and create products and solutions that work for our end users. We’re all in the same business—we’re here to help our end users—but we’re not good at communicating with each other. Library-speak and IS-speak are very different languages (and I think it will be easier for us to learn IS-speak than it is for them to learn library-speak!). There is just so much information out there about IS, about information technology, and it is not that difficult to learn enough to be respectable in a conversation. So I think we need to do it. It’s a way to move collaboration forward.”

Nevertheless, those cross-functional/cross-boundary collaborations are critical with groups other than information technology, and especially with functional units that provide parallel information-focused service delivery. For several managers, these are seen as perfect opportunities for KD/KS, as well as that cross-boundary service delivery noted earlier. These situations provide good opportunities for not only enabling the knowledge services staff to keep up with news relating to those functions (whether immediately relevant to the work in the specialized library or not). By doing so, people working in the library can see what is happening and learn the language and culture of those functions and identify areas that might be relevant for the library. One suggestion is to investigate the organizational structure to determine if there are weekly or bi-weekly meetings to which library and knowledge services staff (or managers) might be invited, in order to share in the high-level view of what is going on in their worlds. Such opportunities provide additional opportunities for information exchange and one another’s work and how efforts in one department might affect the work of the specialized

library or information center. As the manager making this suggestion notes, though, “The library manager gets to share information about what is going on in the library and what might affect some of the other departments represented in these meetings (and, no, don’t talk about National Library Week).”

SERVICE DELIVERY VALUE AND THE MEASUREMENT OF SERVICE DELIVERY

For some who participated in the study, there is a fairly negative attitude about how libraries, information services, and knowledge services are valued in the larger management community. One colleague writes with sadness about how many organizations seem to be unable to put a financial value on these functions, “so when the accountants are looking for cost savings these departments are at the top of the list.”

Is there an answer? For some, it would be, as this manager puts it, to “find a ‘magic bullet’ which can demonstrate in accountant friendly terms just what value an information service and information professionals bring to an organization.” Others have their own techniques and approaches, but like other managers in the organization, they are often surprised at how little financial value is put on the services they and their colleague provide.

One colleague seems to be finding a source of stimulation in the challenge. This person writes, “The biggest challenge that I see here (and elsewhere) is that we are being asked to do more with less. The smart organizations (and I would like to think that there is still an abundance of those!) will not close their libraries, but they will ask the librarians to manage with a smaller staff and increase the responsibilities.” In this case, the manager has responsibility for the specialized library for the organization, as well as the organizational archives, the company’s digitization project and, since the organization includes a wide membership base, an information resource and clearinghouse for the industry. For this person, “The solutions to this challenge will be (and are currently) multi-level: we re-think our priorities and we question whether all of yesterday’s services/tasks, etc. are relevant and necessary today. When required, job descriptions are modified and if the tasks are more than can be accommodated in the hours in the day, we look to what can be outsourced. These are the challenges relating to service delivery that we must confront, and on a daily basis.”

For other respondents, the value of services offered and delivered (whether called library services or something else) must, as noted earlier, be matched to the success of the organization’s strategic mission success. For some, this means, as one colleague puts it, moving “away from” defending the library or library-like function as a place or function (“as we find ourselves doing too often”) and concentrating on

the professional skills and values our information professionals bring to the organization.”

Another solution to the “value” challenge is put forward by the same respondent who (as noted earlier) urges information professionals and managers of specialized libraries to think of themselves as businessmen and businesswomen: “Metrics, metrics, metrics,” this colleague says. “Measure, measure, measure. And deliver measurement results in business terms. There is only one question enterprise management wants answered: Do the services provided by the specialized library or other knowledge functional unit save the organization money? It’s that simple. From the organizational management perspective, it’s all about metrics and ROI. In our profession, we tend to roll our eyes when we hear about ROI but this is what management wants. It is very important to capture metrics, and they must be specific, actionable metrics.”

ADAPTING TO CHANGE AND EMBRACING CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION

In response to the first question about challenges that will affect future service delivery in specialized libraries, comments about change and change management generally fell into two groups. In the first, it was clear that all the old clichés about change and the inevitability of change are well entrenched among managers of specialized libraries. We are all aware that dealing with change is a major concern among managers in all fields, not just in specialized librarianship.

On the other hand, there is the constant refrain about getting through the day, doing all the work that accumulates in the in-box while trying to make room for dealing with inevitable and, yes (sometimes), desirable change. In the world of knowledge services and specialized librarianship, information professionals seem to be focusing primarily on technological change. From the management perspective, this emphasis is not yet ready for characterization as a *fixation* but sometimes there are steps that seem to be leading in that direction. For many of those participating in the study, the biggest challenge is, as one manager puts it, “Keeping up with Web 2.0 and all the challenges and wonderful things it brings.”

As demand seems to be decreasing for reference librarians (due, as one colleague states, “to either a perceived or real decline in need or an increase in user ability to adequately conduct research themselves”), it is of course required that managers of specialized libraries and their staffs know about the tools that are available, if for no other reason than to solidify the library’s relevance in the organization. But that does not mean that we have to know everything there is to know about the technology.

The same colleague continues, “It’s not just things like Outlook rules—we are talking about blogs, wikis, social networking tools, as well as

portals, KM software, federated search, RSS feeds, RFID. It's all out there, and we need to keep up, but we cannot become obsessed with things that might not necessarily help us."

This colleague refers to one period in our history when it was accepted that "technology is best when it is appropriate, and even if the appropriate technology is a safety pin, then use it. But it takes exposure and analysis to find what is appropriate and there is no one 'answer' to the problem. It's a balance, and we have to keep up while still doing our work. We don't need to know the intricacies of every social networking system available out there, but of course these we need to know what they can do and if and how we can use them in our organizations. And we also need to know when to discard things that don't work so that we don't waste time on them."

Related to that last comment, though, is one of another colleague who pointed out that caution is still appropriate: "We want to be careful about throwing out what's working just to replace it with something fashionable." In that statement might be a picture of part of the conflict that seems to concern so many managers, and which the previous participant seems to have captured so effectively: we need to balance.

So the conclusion for managers of specialized libraries, as for all managers, must be that change is happening. If the focus is on technology, we must understand the buzzwords and, as one colleague puts it, "Let's say yes!" (but only if "yes" is the right way to go).

Yet there is more to change management and change implementation than technology. The recommended solution from several colleagues and managers of specialized libraries is the fast-paced and demanding approach to human change management that many people resist, the "flavor" of which one colleague captured well: "We must be open to change and growth." Or, as another stated boldly: "Adapt. Adapt. And adapt some more!"

For another colleague, when responding to the first question, the answer is to recognize the necessity of the network, both within the profession and beyond it, relating of course to the earlier comments about collaboration:

"The next thing that comes to mind," she says, "is not so much a challenge as a change. Smart organizations are realizing that the librarian has talents that resonate beyond the four walls of the library, and they are inviting us and our services to be embedded in projects and programs as integral parts, providing the reference, research, analysis, synthesis, and organization skills. Instead of calling upon me as needed, management is including me in meetings from inception through implementation. I'm part of the teams, and this has not always been so. I understand that some organizations have been doing this for years, but my sense is that wide-spread acceptance and adoption is yet to come. Still, it is happening in my place and I am very comfortable

with this new—and slightly different—role. My work is much more satisfying to me as a professional.”

A critical observation about the change management process was made by the manager of a specialized library who obviously keeps a keen eye open to what is going on in the larger organization.

“Listen to folks both older and more experienced than you,” this colleague writes, “and to people younger and newer to the profession, and to everyone in between. Their views and suggestions on the profession and the trends and challenges we are going through together are important signposts for us, and we want to follow them.”

Change Management

For more about change management, see the several publications of the SMR International Management Action Plans, published by SMR International. These SMR MAPs, as they are called, are a series of management workbooks and a feature of each is an opening essay on knowledge services and the development of the knowledge culture and a closing essay on change management and change implementation. For more information about the SMR MAPs, contact info@smr-knowledge.com

Finally, the ubiquitous nature of change management and change implementation gets on our nerves sometimes (as happens with any manager, regardless of the field of expertise or professional environment). There are ways for dealing with this, and perhaps a little semantic sleight of hand is all that is called for. Several colleagues commented on how “change management” as a management methodology or tool is not taken seriously in many situations, yet essential to the whole change management process is an understanding of the attributes of good change management, and several participants remarked about how important it is to be aware of and utilize the attributes of change management in the operation of the specialized library or other knowledge services functional unit. So, as one colleague remarked, “Call it something else if you need to, if ‘change management’ has become too much of a cliché in your organization. It doesn’t matter what you call it, but if you are going to succeed as a manager in a specialized library, you had better be comfortable with the principles of change management!”

EFFICIENCIES OF MANAGEMENT

One of the most worrisome challenges for managers in specialized libraries has to do with access. As one colleague responded, “Access is both expanding and constricting at the same time.... Perhaps like a python squeezing its prey? Significant content continues to grow while at the same time, it becomes prohibitively expensive in some cases, difficult to use, or simply unavailable except to subscribers and controlled by third party vendors, or privacy issues, or cost. We have major challenges as managers to deal with this issue.”

At the same time, the constructs relating to knowledge management are using much energy and staff resources. This should be a good thing, but there are some performance issues. “As far as knowledge management goes,” one manager writes, “we don’t use the term. For us, the term ‘KM’ doesn’t mean anything, but if we can incorporate the elements of KM into a larger function, such as knowledge services or a similar function, we can do the work as that, but not as KM. For us, what is thought of generally as KM in our shop is thought of as

knowledge searching. We see something coming that will be like Google desktop—which is good but it is limited to the desktop—and while we are now working with what we call *unified searching* we also recognize that for most of us, we’re never going to get to 100% ‘knowledge management.’ No matter how good the tools get, most human beings are pretty lazy so what we provide is help and assistance in moving in the right direction. At the present time we’re all pretty Google-minded and that type of thinking and service provision will get us about 70% of the way there, but that’s about as good as it will get. In most of our organizations, we’re looking at just-in-time service delivery and real-time service delivery, and we have to recognize that it’s OK to rediscover what has already been discovered and make something else of it which is, in the general scheme of things, what KM and knowledge services is all about.”

As for other concerns with efficiencies of management, outsourcing and off-shoring are given much attention, particularly in larger organizations and companies. As one manager puts it, “Why pay professionals to perform back-office work?” Related to the higher-level service delivery described elsewhere in this report, the move toward outsourced and/or off-shoring for back office work enables the professionals (whether they are characterized as “qualified” professionals or not) to engage in work that is more demanding, more connected to the mission of the larger enterprise, and, as one manager enjoys describing it in response to the questions, “more fun.”

The information/knowledge/strategic learning management construct of knowledge services is seen in many organizations where the specialized library (or former specialized library) has been restructured as a knowledge asset management function and the services delivery framework has moved, as one colleague describes it, “from reactive to proactive to integrated.” Research specialists from that functional unit are now embedded or—in one description—“insourced” to serve as the knowledge services specialist on project teams.

“I predict,” writes one colleagues, “that this sort of project team participation will become more of the standard in the future. Information professionals will function more as part of individual projects and teams and the stand-alone information professional—perhaps even the stand-alone information or library unit—will cease to be a functional role. Such a prediction does, I’m aware, cast me in sort of a Cassandra-esque role, but we have to think about what our organizations need and I’m not sure they will be willing to pay for an entire functional unit when individual skills specialists can be hired and move from team to team or project to project as required.”

Another potential difficulty in looking for efficiencies of management has to do with electronic content delivery. It is now common practice to deliver as much content to desktops as possible, which means, as one colleague describes it, “we are making strategic investment

decisions all the time. Journal and database costs are escalating every year and outpacing any increases in funding for providing this access, and it is a situation that is going to require even more strategic investment decisions. Of course it requires cutting some subscriptions and investing in on-demand services for some items that are expensive but still needed on occasion. And, let's be frank about it, sometimes it requires that I—as the manager of this facility—have to go back into my role as an arbiter or gate-keeper. If the company cannot afford to license a particular product for each researcher, perhaps I or one of my senior staff have to become the person with authority to decide whether or not that particular tool will be used by that particular researcher. It is a tough role for some, and it can be an uncomfortable role, but it is one that our companies are demanding, and we are the best people to make these decisions, whether we like doing it or not.”

STAFFING

Finding the right people to work as information/knowledge/strategic learning professionals is discussed by special library managers on an on-going basis. For many reasons, there are concerns about the employees who are being prepared for careers in librarianship and who are then being hired to work in specialized libraries (which might explain the move in some organizations to hire non-degreed information professionals—that is, information professionals who have not studied in graduate LIS programs). At the same time, the enthusiasm and skills of some of the newer employees provide more than the proverbial “fresh air” in the organizations where they are employed. They bring talents and skills that, while not the same as those of their older colleagues, enable them to look at customer relationship management and service delivery matters from an very different perspective.

The point is made by a colleague who addresses the issue frankly: “Close the generation gap,” this manager says. “Get over it and get rid of the sweeping generalizations. At the same time, figure out how to share with the new generation how to evaluate the information that is inundating them. It doesn't matter whether they work in our units or in some other unit in the organization, we information professionals should not be worried about ‘keeping up’ with these users. We should be leading the charge, showing them how to cut through the masses of inferior information to which they are exposed.”

Another manager also commented about the idea of “keeping up” with users. “Libraries,” this colleague writes, “are being challenged to ‘keep up’ with users, who are also moving targets. We try to catch up with them when we should be ahead of the pack. While there may be organizations that are able to be there with their users, using the same technologies, many information professionals in other organizations are stymied by inflexible thinking and (especially) by funding limitations. It is up to those of us who have this management responsibility to

figure out how we can keep 'ahead of the pack,' to ensure that we are 'out in front' for our users who need us to help them in dealing with some of these access and technology issues.”

Another staff issue that seems to be coming up more and more frequently has to do with the preconceptions of some of those employed in the specialized library. “We must reorient the staff toward the user and toward meeting their needs,” one colleague writes. “We’ve got to move the staff away from the collections and the processes. Collection management and other processes like ILL and cataloging need to be seamless to our users, and we need to incorporate frameworks that highlight what the users can do instead of building barriers that slow them down and make them think too hard. At the present time, our integrated library systems aren't too good for this, but some of the journal and database vendors have made great strides in creating dynamic links and making the process easier for patrons. We just need to keep driving our changes based on the user experience.”

Or, as another colleague put it, “At our library our new tag-line spells it all out: We’re about ‘Connections Not Collections,’ and it is a concept that our customers have taken to with much enthusiasm. Of course it means changes in staff management, staff approaches, and that sort of thing, and it isn’t easy, but it is worth it to let our customers know that we are there to provide connections to the information and knowledge they require. If it is in the collection, fine. If it is not, we’ll show them how to get to it. But the hardest part is the staff and the frequent tendency of some of the staff to keep things like they have ‘always been’ in the library. There is plenty of resistance.”

The key here would seem to be the strategic-learning “piece” of knowledge services, not so much for the specialized library’s customers but for the staff. Almost every participant in the study writes about the role of non-stop skills development and professional learning as the library’s focus moves into a new type of service delivery.

As for the managers themselves, this is a typical response: “I am taking a year-long certificate class in KM. I read a lot of literature, attend conferences, and try to keep abreast of new developments and challenges, and I look to internal meetings, ‘brown-bag’ lunches, and the like to learn about new subjects and new people. I learned long ago that what I learned in graduate school (I have both an M.S.L.S. and an M.B.A.) would have a very short shelf-life. So it has been up to me to keep up. I do it and I expect my staff to do it.”

As for those reluctant staff members, another colleague suggests that employees must build or acquire new skill sets and it is the managers who must help them decide what they need, to mentor them in deciding what they need to learn. “The suite of skills a library manager

needs tomorrow,” this participant writes, “will continue to be the business skills that can define and defend a decision. Collection development, cataloging, and reference are still the core skills of a library but each of those is now placed in the context of cost/benefit analysis and the business case for the decisions. Some of this can be acquired through partnerships in other parts of the organization but some of it must be here within our own team.”

Along with acquiring new skill sets, today’s information professionals are being required to work under modified job descriptions. One manager writes, “Yesterday’s competencies and skills are not necessarily what the firm requires of librarians today,” and there continue to be problems with head-hunters and executive search people. “These people are still in the ‘librarian’ mode,” this manager writes, “too ‘inside the box’ and unable to spread beyond the ‘librarian’ idea and go after CIOs, people with more diverse experience. These people should be part of the research team and the knowledge asset management group. They don’t all have to be librarians and, frankly speaking, where some of these people have been groomed are not the best places for the employees needed to work in the new environment. We can use people with any kind of experience to work in research—we can teach them how to do research—but they must be groomed to understand the basics of the workplace, and we are just not seeing those people.”

Another manager commented about how librarianship has always been a “people industry” and this person thinks it still is. “But somehow,” the manager continues, “the people coming to work in the industry today are not willing to be integrated into the organization. That’s a problem for us.”

The responses to the staffing challenge wrap up with a call from one of the participants for continued renewal, continued re-thinking of what the role of the information and knowledge services professional should be. “We can’t fall back into the trap of the librarian ‘mystique’ or the librarian’s ‘special place in society,” this colleague writes. When we do that we are our own worst enemies. We are doing ourselves in. Too often, the librarians have defended the library, not their skills and their value to the organization. The real value of any library is never the books on the shelves (or data in the system). It is in the skill set that librarians bring to organizing those shelves (or that data) and their ability to lay their hands on just what is needed when it is needed. Librarians have been defending their past instead of defining their future. The Internet may be untamed, but the librarian is the expert who can navigate that mess!”

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