

TOWARDS OVERCOMING THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT BARRIER IN GHANAIAN LIBRARIES

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries have traditionally prided themselves in the sizes of, and the potential information in, their collections of documents of various kinds. And, in this information technology age, libraries are also constantly reminded that they must keep pace with new technologies for information storage and retrieval, for information resource networking, for library management, and for public services. However, beyond collection sizes and content, and beyond technological artifacts, the ability of a library to provide effective services to its clientele depends critically on the experience, motivation and management of its human resources. Human resources make things happen in libraries, not items in the collection, not technological artifacts. Collection items and technological artifacts provide potential capabilities for processing and disseminating information. But human resources determine whether these potentials can be harnessed to satisfy the information needs of library patrons.

The purpose of this paper is to review the nature of requisite human resources for the effective development of Ghanaian libraries to meet the specific needs of library patrons, as well as the challenges of technological and social development. To that end, I will ini-

tially review key issues pertaining to human resources development generally. I will then highlight the potential human resource development problems in Ghanaian libraries, strategies for overcoming the problems, as well as the roles that various stakeholders in the development of Ghanaian libraries can and should play.

DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT IN GHANAIAN LIBRARIES

What constitutes human resources?

The human resources of an organization represents one of its largest investments (Byars & Rue, 1994). Moreover, 'human resources' comprise not only the individual personalities contributing to the running of the organization, but also the system of interrelationships among individuals within the cultural and policy frameworks of each organization. In other words, human resources encompass such notions as the quantity and quality of personnel, as well as managerial practices, employer-employee relations, work ethics, organizational dynamics, management development processes, etc. Accordingly, human resource development in a library must involve the processes of planning, recruiting, and developing the optimum number and quality of the different categories of library per-

sonnel, as well as the implementation of appropriate managerial systems and practices for motivating individuals towards optimum productivity within a dynamic and goal-oriented library organization.

We should also not forget that the human resources of a library, like that of any other organization, also include the external human resources that the library can count upon and use - library consultants, temporary help, professional colleagues and associations, human resources of other libraries, etc. It is sometimes more cost-effective to contract for such resources than to employ and develop them in-house.

Invariably, human resource development issues manifest at two levels: at the micro level of individual libraries and also at the macro or industry level of all libraries. Both aspects are important and related. For instance, a library can count on augmenting its internal human resources with external resources only to the extent that the library industry is rich in such resources. At the same time, progressive human resource development programmes in individual libraries are likely to improve the quantum and quality of library human resources that all libraries can eventually mutually draw upon either as internal or external resources.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES IN INDIVIDUAL LIBRARIES

Dimensions of the human resource development problem

For a specific library, the human resource development problem has at least six dimensions:

1. planning organizational and human resource development programmes;
2. recruiting required human resources;
3. training and developing staff;
4. motivating staff;
5. making effective use of staff;
6. maintaining a healthy organizational climate.

Of course, all six dimensions are interwoven in various ways. For instance, the ability of a library to recruit appropriate new staff would depend on potential new recruits' expectations of remuneration, career, personal growth and job satisfaction prospects in that library, variables that are influenced by organizational programmes and practices pertaining to staff. Also, at any point in time, the ability of a library to make effective use of its staff will depend on such factors as the appropriateness of organizational and management development programmes, organizational climate, staff motivation, etc.

The dimensions of the human resource development problem usually manifest differently in libraries of different sizes. For example, the human resources of a small one-person research library might be just that person. Hence, all six dimensions pertain to, and must be addressed by, that person. In such a library, 'recruiting new staff' could mean contracting outside human resources, or replacing that one person. Also, the training development of that person could be difficult, as there might not be any other staff to whom the person can temporarily hand over. Moreover, a human resource crisis might ensue when that person decides abruptly to leave. Contrast that with a large academic library or network of metropolitan libraries that might boast of hundreds of staff, as well as the fi-

nancial resources to augment its in-house human resources with outside resources.

Also, the dimensions also manifest in different ways for different types of libraries - academic, public, school, and special. For example, the need to recruit cataloguers and indexers to perform original cataloguing or indexing tasks might be more a problem for special libraries with specialized collections than for large academic libraries which can do with downloaded catalogue records from MARC tapes or CD-ROM. Similarly, libraries that are at the initiation stages of computerization would need human resources with appropriate information technology (IT) skills more than other libraries, and are also more likely to experience the pains associated with the organizational changes required for computerization (e.g. conflicts between their experienced and long-serving staff and new staff possessing IT skills).

Organizational and management development programmes

Even assuming that individual libraries can easily recruit from the library industry the desired human resources of the required categories, much will still depend on the planning and implementation of effective organizational and management development programmes in individual libraries. *Organizational development* pertains to the development of appropriate personnel, institutional structures, culture and climate that helps the organization to achieve its goals. On the other hand, *management development* refers to the processes of developing in specific staff, the experience, attitudes and skills necessary for them to become effective managers. Clearly, personnel and management devel-

opment are crucial aspects of organizational development.

Organizational and management development programmes are more likely to be well planned and implemented if library managers are well trained and experienced to start with, if they periodically refresh themselves with new management ideas and techniques, and if they do not allow emotions to unduly cloud their sense of objective decision making. There is no gainsaying that library managers would desire to really help their libraries and themselves through well-planned and implemented human resources development programmes. But no matter how initially well trained such managers might be, they can clearly also benefit from professionally reinvigorating continuing education programmes sponsored by various stakeholders in the development of the Ghanaian library industry and profession.

A library manager might often ponder what programmes he/she must plan and implement for what human resources, when and how. However, the real problem often is that a library manager might, without realizing it, be running his/her library year in, year out, without periodic stock taking towards planning projects for the development of the library. What is often lacking in most such cases is a project management approach to managing the library. The significance of the project management approach, if properly followed, is that it forces library managers to consider the human resources that their libraries would need for successfully achieving the goals of the projects that they initiate. Surely, if a manager is committed to achieving the goals of one or more planned projects, he/she

would have planned, and would implement, the necessary human resources development programmes that will assure the achievement of the goals of the projects.

In this connection, I must also mention an important aspect of project management - contingency planning. A library manager must, at any point in time, have ready viable human resource contingency plans for every key library function or activity. Such contingency human resources could be within or outside the library. Within the library, an important contingency strategy would be to ensure that more than one person possess the skills required to perform key library functions or activities. This can sometimes be achieved by periodically rotating staff among such key functions. I must mention in this connection the dangers inherent in a library manager failing to develop his/her subordinate(s). Such practice runs against the tenet of contingency planning. After all, the managerial function itself is a key library function. Sometimes, managers deliberately fail to develop their subordinates to ensure that their subordinates cannot replace them. However, quite apart from dampening the motivation of the subordinates, the library itself might suffer in the long run. As noted earlier, management development programmes are a necessary requirement for the sustainability of the progress and momentum that a library might have attained at any point in its development. And library managers should be more interested in pioneering good library systems and programmes that are sustained by the people they themselves had developed.

Alemna (1994) noted that during the preceding decade, Ghana had not invested ad-

equately in the continuing education of librarians and information personnel after job placement. One might now wonder whether the situation has improved substantially for individual libraries, and for the library industry as a whole. In this respect, library managers should not forget that sponsored formal and informal staff training programmes, apart from providing means for staff to acquire new job-related knowledge and skills, are also means by which staff can experience temporary but often refreshing changes in their working/learning environment, and sometimes, for also gaining international experience. Staff often also look forward to the allowances associated with such periodic sponsored training. Hence, library managers need to consider various training programme options for their staff, such as training on-the-job, within sister libraries, in the library school, by local professional associations, and abroad. Also, what about short-period staff exchange programmes among similar types of libraries?

It is also important to note that, under certain circumstances, inappropriate organizational and management development programmes by individual libraries might indirectly affect the library industry and profession as well. We all know that high profile libraries, although small in number, often exert significant influence on trends in the library profession and industry either because they employ the more prominent library professionals, and/or because they employ large quantities of the industry's human resources. Hence, if such libraries fail to plan and administer effective human resource development programmes, they might experience staff turnover or staffing constraints which

jeopardize their programmes and services in the first round. In the second round, some of their frustrated staff might then exit, and might also exit the profession as well because of lack of opportunities elsewhere in the industry. Then, in the third round, such large libraries might succeed in attracting new recruits, often from smaller unfortunate libraries, thereby causing human resource crises in those libraries as well. Hence, the need to consider the industry-wide implications of human resource problems at the level of such prominent libraries. Implied is the need for various stakeholders in the development of the profession and industry to implement strategies to enable library managers to improve their managerial effectiveness generally, as well as planning and implementation of in-house library human resources in particular.

Library human resources for the information age.

The 21st century is knocking on the door of every Ghanaian library. Whether we like it or not, the next century will witness further progress of the information age wherein the buzz-word will continue to be information technology (IT). Sooner than later Ghanaian library patrons living in an Internet-propelled global village will be demanding more and more IT-based library services and resources. And libraries must find the means to be ready to meet patrons' needs, else they will just become irrelevant. I believe it is better for libraries to implement strategies for providing such IT-based services proactively than reactively. A proactive approach will afford libraries the opportunity to adequately understand and exploit the technology at their own planned pace.

However, libraries in Ghana, as in most other

developing countries, face a serious dilemma in this respect. They lack the resources to acquire IT for proactive IT-based services, but they know very well that the pressure is on, and will soon be unbearable. The dilemma is worse in the public sector libraries than in the private sector libraries.

But even in those libraries where there are resources to acquire the IT, or where IT equipment and infrastructure have actually been acquired, there are often problems with the most critical of all resources - human resources. Sometimes the human resources required for the effective exploitation of IT are not there. Sometimes they are there in quantity, but not in quality. Quality here means the managerial and technical capability of the human resources to plan for the exploitation of the technology. Both Badu (1990) and Entsua-Mensah (1989) have noted the lack of appropriate IT human resources as a major problem militating against the effective provision of IT-based services in Ghanaian libraries. Writing in respect of Ghanaian university libraries, Badu (1990) was very graphic in his description of the problems (words in parentheses added for clarity):

'The number one problem regarding the use of computers in Ghanaian (university) libraries is lack of the necessary expertise... Staff development (for IT) in the University of Ghana library is lacking. The traditional librarians have no knowledge of computers at all... University of Science and Technology has the worst staff problem. There is no systems librarian and it does not appear that one of its librarians is going to be trained in that direction. The work is being undertaken by someone with computer know-how, but who lacks library knowledge. In his absence op-

erations will definitely come to a standstill. (Badu, 1990).”

There has been some improvement in the libraries since Badu (1990) wrote seven years ago. But the problems of IT human resources are a serious concern for many library managers. Many libraries have suffered from having invested in young IT human resources talent only to lose them to other libraries or even non-library occupations. Usually, such talent had possessed the scarce computer science or information technology qualification before they were employed, and had used the library employment as stepping stones to other more lucrative jobs and careers. And when they leave, the IT projects for which they were recruited and developed suffer. Those who stay sometimes hoard their skills, as insurance. On the other hand, highly experienced and long-serving library staff often react to genuine efforts to train them for IT thus: “what the heck, I only have a few years before retiring, so why should I bother about these IT ‘toys’?” Only if such highly experienced staff would realize that there is always the possibility of consulting for libraries after retirement, and that in the 21st century they will be better off as library IT consultants!.

The IT human resource problem is compounded by the currently very low remuneration that libraries can offer. And it does not appear that the problem can be adequately resolved until there is some glut in the labour market for persons possessing high-level IT skills. My suggestion is that the problem can be ameliorated by intensive IT training programmes sponsored by both the Ghana Library Association and the University of Ghana’s library school. Accordingly, the library school should consider up-scaling the practical IT content of both its undergraduate diploma and M L S degree programmes to such a level that graduates will be adequately IT proficient for the Ghanaian libraries of the 21st century. The Ghana library Association can also develop an IT continuing education training school or programmes for practising librarians. Also, international donor agencies might be approached with realistic project proposals by both the library school and the association towards expanding the IT training capabilities of various library education programmes in the country. Already, the university libraries are jointly implementing a project to develop an IT laboratory at the library school. This is laudable.

However, I must note that the provision of IT training facilities in formal training programmes must be complemented in all cases by in-house IT working facilities. Usually, learnt skills that are not immediately put to continuing and productive use are quickly forgotten. Hence, libraries should also initiate plans to introduce computers into their operations, even if initially at a very modest scale. In this respect, although the current technology is usually ‘Pentium microcomputer with Windows 95/97 plus the latest applications software’, many libraries can still begin to automate some of their basic data processing operations with some ‘seemingly obsolete’ technology (e.g., 386 microcomputers) that might be lying idle in some wealthy organizations in Ghana or abroad. I believe that an ‘IT-Trust’ programme might succeed in putting some of such equipment to profitable use in some of our libraries. The Ghana Library Association should note this.

MACRO-SOCIETAL DIMENSIONS OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT PROBLEM

Balancing the library human resources demand and supply equation

A major library human resource development problem at the macro or industry level is the relative scarcity of various types of library human resources that might exist side-by-side with relative glut of other library human resources. Economists refer to this as a resource mis-allocation problem, because it reveals that less than optimally balanced resources are being allocated to the development of different categories of library human resources by various stakeholders who contribute to the total societal supply of the resources - library schools, libraries, the library profession, governments, and non-governmental organizations.

From the perspective of a single library in the industry, it might not matter if it is able to snatch its new recruited staff from other unfortunate libraries, provided that it does not itself lose staff to other libraries at the same or other times. For example, due to the better remuneration now enjoyed by staff of university libraries than staff of public or school libraries, such libraries are more likely to snatch staff from, than lose staff to, the other libraries. Of course, university libraries are, in turn, also similarly vulnerable to private sector libraries. The problem posed for the losing libraries is that they lose significant previous investment in the staff. Losing libraries become frustrated because some of their library development projects and programmes are consequently compromised. Undesirable staff turnover is often a serious problem with young library staff with IT skills

who might have been trained with scarce resources by the losing library. Of course, the lost investment of an unlucky library is often not fully gained by the lucky library, as the new staff often must be re-oriented into the environment of the new library before their potentials can be fully exploited.

Such turnover of staff becomes rampant when the library human resource market for specific categories of library human resources is unable to meet demand. Actually, some staff turnover is desirable in any competitive labour market as a means for better allocating the societal pool of human resources, and also as a means by which individual libraries can achieve desirable change in their human resource profiles. However, the problem is that, often, those who exit first are the vibrant staff that other libraries find attractive.

The library profession in Ghana, as it should be in any other country and industry, must find a solution to the problem of undesirable staff turnover that often prevents many libraries from consolidating and sustaining whatever developmental gains they might have been able to eke out of scarce resources.

NEED FOR CLEAR PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Paths in the library profession and industry

It is usually desirable, in any professional endeavour, for entrants to the profession to foresee a clear career development path within both the profession and the associated industry. Is that the case with the library profession in Ghana presently? In Ghana, as is

most other countries of the world, the MLS is recognized as the minimum qualification for full library professional recognition. However, presently, the only library school in the country, the University of Ghana's Department of Library and Archival Studies, offers an MLS degree programme, and an undergraduate Diploma in Library Studies. Diplomates are either employed as library para-professionals, or else use the qualification to seek admission to first degree programmes in other subjects. The latter option often leads to net losses to the library profession and industry, because degrees in subjects other than library studies provide access to many other professions and industries.

On the surface, the BLS would seem the missing rung in the library professional development ladder. However, the BLS is often not regarded as a useful library qualification, and some employers, particularly university libraries, would not employ persons on the basis of this qualification. University libraries would want the library professionals that they employ to be subject specialists before the MLS so that each professional can provide information service support for a specific university discipline. The big gap between the diploma in Library Studies and the MLS is probably one of the reasons for, as noted by a university library administrator, the difficulty university libraries have in developing their para-professionals to fill junior professional positions. A minimum MLS is associated with these positions, but it would be risky and costly for a library to sponsor its para-professionals for an initial non-library first degree, and then for an MLS.

Will a BLS degree programme solve the

problem of the missing rung in the transition ladder from library para-professional to full professional status? In 1994, Professor Alemna of the library school wrote (words in parentheses added for clarity):

"Attempts have been made to create a whole Department of Library Studies at the University of Cape Coast which would produce BA Library Studies graduates. However, a number of librarians and government officials have raised objections to this because they feel it is not desirable at present. (Alemna, 1994)."

Professor Alemna advised then that the University of Cape Coast proposals were good enough to be worth pursuing. I agree. But what professional status would holders of BLS be accorded in Ghanaian libraries in view of the existing MLS minimum requirement for professional recognition? This is an issue that will not just go away but must be carefully addressed and resolved. Introducing BLS programmes without resolving the professional recognition issue will not auger well for the healthy development of BLS graduates in the profession. Of course, another strategy to avoid the BLS recognition problem altogether might be the library school allowing holders of its undergraduate diploma to be admitted to the MLS programme after a specified minimum period of post-diploma practical experience.

In conclusion, I want to stress that clear professional and career development paths for entrants to the library profession are desirable within individual libraries, within similar types of libraries, and in the library industry. This is in order to reassure library professionals, as well as potential entrants to the profession, of a well organized profession and

industry devoid of frustrating obstacles to the realization of both the personal career goals of individuals, and the development of adequate human resources for libraries in the industry. I believe there is need for vigorous collaboration among the Ghana Library Association, the University of Ghana's Library School, key employers of library human resources, and other stakeholders, on the issue.

TOWARD IMPROVING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE LIBRARY HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT PROBLEM AND STRATEGIES IN GHANA

We are here gathered to discuss both the organizational or societal aspects of the human resource development problem. At the level of all libraries, or of specific categories of libraries, there is need for stakeholders to adopt strategies for the optimal development of library human resources. However, the strategies must spring from an in-depth understanding of the nature of the human resource development constraints at both organizational and societal levels.

In this respect, an important strategy is a library human resources survey at the national level with a view to identifying areas of human resource development progress and bottlenecks. For instance, we should be interested in identifying various categories of library human resources, by level, by specific library management functions, by computing support skills, etc., that are currently relatively abundant or scarce in the industry. Clearly, such information is required for devising and implementing strategies for addressing the scarcity of specific library human resources

in the industry.

Towards preparing this paper, I began but could not finish a small study in the Greater Accra Region towards finding out problems that libraries might be experiencing in recruiting, developing, and retaining different levels and categories of library human resources. My object was to collect some information for possibly inferring areas of current relative scarcity of library human resources in Ghana. For the study, I identified the following categories and classes of library human resources:

By managerial/professional levels in libraries:

- (a) very top management positions;
- (b) senior professional positions;
- (c) junior professional positions;
- (d) para-professional positions.

By Specific library functions/tasks:

- (a) cataloguing tasks;
- (b) subject indexing tasks;
- (c) reference services;
- (d) user training and orientation;
- (e) children and other special user services;
- (f) Archiving/binding/conservation.

By levels of computing skills:

- (a) computer data entry;
- (b) computer system supervision;
- (c) computer repair and maintenance.

Of course, finer categories and levels of human resources can probably be determined. But the incomplete information that I was able to obtain from the few libraries and librarians with whom I interacted, suggested that it seems:

- (a) more difficult to fill junior profes-

sional positions, reference service positions, and computer repair and maintenance positions than other positions;

- (b) more difficult to develop personnel for very top management and senior professional positions, for cataloguing tasks, and for computer repair and maintenance positions;
- (c) more difficult to retain personnel in top management positions, in computer system supervision, and in computer repair and maintenance.

More conclusive results will be known when the study is completed. But the above illustrates the benefits that the study can bring. Of course, as noted earlier on in this paper, the relative demands for different types of library human resources would vary by type of library (small/ medium/large, university/

school/public, etc), and for libraries in different developmental situations. I believe that the Ghana Library Association should undertake or support such and similar initiatives towards identifying the nature, potentials, problems and strategies of the library human resources development situation in Ghana.

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