GROWING NEXT GENERATION LIBRARY MANAGERS – ARE NEW LIBRARIANS RELUCTANT TO STEP INTO MANAGEMENT?

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written about the "greying" of the library profession and the need for comprehensive workforce planning in the face of significant retirement. [1,2] Recent publications[3,4] have suggested that new librarians are reluctant to take on leadership and management roles within libraries. Some of the reasons outlined for this reluctance include negative perceptions of current library managers and the desire to achieve satisfactory work-life balance. As libraries face the challenge of workforce retirement, particularly at a senior level, it is vital that strategies are put in place to encourage librarians to take the next step into management.

This paper will test the assumption that newer librarians are reluctant to move into management positions through surveys and interviews of librarians who have graduated within the last ten years. The data collected will establish whether this reluctance exists and if so, why. The authors will outline a number of strategies for ensuring a positive view of management is promoted and modelled within the library industry.

The paper will also report on the Stepping into Management Program, a strategy developed in Western Australia, to encourage younger librarians to aspire to management positions.

INTRODUCTION

Like many countries around the world, Australia is experiencing a "greying" of its library and information workforce. According to statistics released by the Australian Government [5-7] there are 29,600 librarians, library technicians and library assistants currently working in Australia. Librarians make up about 48% (14,200) of library workers. The median age of a librarian in Australia is 50 (compared with 39 for all occupations), with only 14.8% aged 35 or under (compared with 39.3% for all occupations).

Gill Hallam[1] has conducted extensive research on workforce planning in Australia, including a national survey which shows that almost a third of current library and information employees plan to retire in the next ten years, and that the majority of these will come from senior and middle management positions. The ageing librarian workforce in Australia is similar to the situation in a number of other countries; see for example studies conducted in the United States[8] and Canada.[9]

Although planning and development is essential at any career stage, the focus of this paper is on librarians who have graduated in the last ten years and their attitude about eventually working in management. This cohort was selected due to predictions about the retirement of a significant number of Australian librarians (particularly senior librarians) in the not too distant future and concerns about the reluctance of new librarians to aspire to management positions.

ARE LIBRARIANS RELUCTANT TO TAKE ON MANAGEMENT ROLES? WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

Ensuring that there are enough competent new library managers willing and able to take up positions as retirements occur is an issue recognised widely in the literature.[10-16] Nancy Rossiter says that:

> ...recruiting the next generation of library leaders is of critical importance. One roadblock to this recruitment effort is the negative perception of leadership positions from Generation X and Y librarians and the unwillingness of many librarians to aspire to positions of middle management…those in leadership positions need to address the problem and make leadership more attractive to nascent library leaders.[10]

Singer, Goodrich and Goldberg[12] also believe that it's up to current managers to identify librarians who are capable of taking on management positions and ensuring they are given the right opportunities to develop.

But how can they be identified if they are not interested in moving into management in the first place? Rachel Singer Gordon asks the question, "Why do we find that many librarians do not want to be managers?"[13] She says there is an unwillingness to sacrifice family and home lives. The image "of endless meetings, becoming embroiled in both internal and external politics, and spending all their time on administrative duties rather than frontline tasks" does not encourage newer librarians to aspire to management positions.

This perceived negative image of managers is reinforced in a 2008 blog post entitled "Sorry but you can't have it all" which claims that the "current generation of academic library directors need to better communicate that their jobs do occasionally involve long hours, but that there can be great rewards."[3] This blog post sparked a number of further comments, most notably in a follow up post entitled "But what if I don't want it all?" by Bivens-Tatum:

I was particularly irritated by the notion that library directors need to give us mere librarians a 'dose of reality'…We Gen-X and Gen-Y librarians...know what reality is, thank you very much. Personal sacrifices, work-life imbalance, staying late, working weekends: many of us do that without either the title or salary of "director," and to imply otherwise itself shows a disconnect from reality. The generational difference, if indeed there is one, is that perhaps the younger generation doesn't see this sort of sacrifice as a badge of honor so much as a road to unhappiness and burnout.[17]

Bivens-Tatum concludes by suggesting reasons why some librarians are not interested in senior management positions which include having to deal with staff, spending 10 to 20 years in middle-management before promotion, and being more interested in working as a "librarian" than focussing on management and administration.

This focus on librarianship, as opposed to management, is reinforced by Rowley and Roberts who suggest there is "a sense that library and information professionals are reluctant to become leaders, not seeing this as their domain but preferring to focus on 'professional' library issues." [4]

Gordon[18] has conducted two surveys relating to library management. The first surveyed current library managers and found that many respondents "accidentally" find their way into management. The second survey asked library staff to identify the good and bad traits of managers. As yet it does not appear that a survey looking specifically at new librarians and their views about working in management in future has been conducted.

NEW LIBRARIANS AND MANAGEMENT SURVEY

The widespread retirement of current library managers will result in many opportunities for new librarians to progress up the career ladder, but do they actually want to?

A national survey to establish what "new" librarians think about working in "management" roles was designed in December 2008. The survey was developed using the online tool SurveyMonkey.com[19] and was distributed via a number of Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) electronic lists. Responses were collected over a two week period in January 2009.

In the survey design phase, colleagues were asked what defined a "new" librarian. Some thought it meant being within 0 to 5 years of graduation, others within 10 years of graduation and some felt it has nothing to do with years in the profession, but defined a way of thinking. For the purposes of the survey, a "new" librarian was defined as someone who had completed her or his first library and information studies professional qualification in the last 10 years.

"Management," in the context of the survey, was considered as undertaking one or more of the following tasks; budgeting and financial management, managing staff training and development, policy development, human resources planning and management, organisational planning and decision making, managing facilities and building operations, and marketing and public relations. The focus of the survey is on library management, not leadership. While leadership can occur at any level within an organisation, management usually implies some responsibility for ensuring the work of others is completed. The differences between leadership and management have, of course, been the subject of much discussion[15] and are too lengthy to be debated here. The viewpoint held by the authors of this paper is that leadership skills are essential in managing effectively in today's changing environment. If the library and information profession is to thrive and survive, managers who can influence, inspire, innovate, motivate and facilitate are required. It is no longer enough for managers to simply apply a "command and control" attitude towards management. This view is supported by others; see for example Rowley and Roberts,[4] Roberts and Black,[15] and Walton.[20]

There are four parts to the survey. The first collected demographic data about the respondents, such as their age and the library sector in which they work. Those in management roles were then asked a series of questions about their current job, and those not working in management were asked whether they would like to work in this area in future. The third part of the survey related to management training and the final section asked respondents to make any additional comments about librarians and management.

The use of electronic lists to distribute the survey facilitated access to a large number of potential respondents nationally; however it is acknowledged that as list members could choose to respond or not it is difficult to make generalisations based on the responses, as the results may be slanted. It is possible, however, to draw some indications and conclusions from the survey.

RESULTS

Demographic data

A total of 350 survey responses were received, 301 were fully completed. Incomplete surveys are excluded from analysis for the purposes of this paper. It is impossible to calculate the overall response rate as the potential number of respondents is unknown.

Of the 301 survey respondents, 173 (57.5%) were aged 35 or under (see Figure 1). Based on the statistics[5] mentioned above, this is approximately 8.2% of total librarians aged 35 or under currently working in Australia.
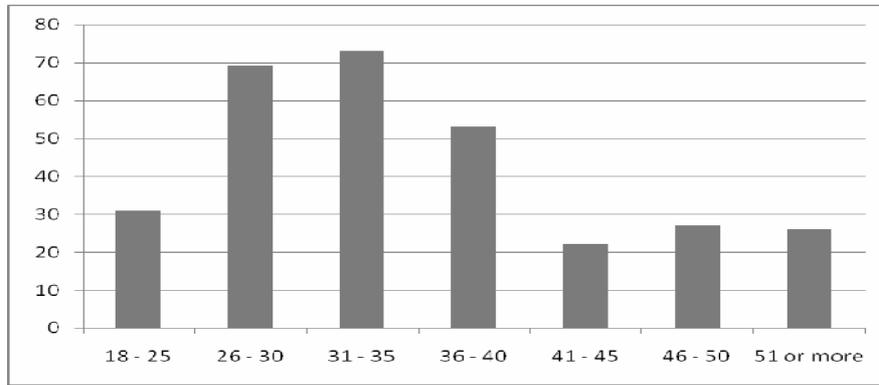
Figure 1: Survey respondents by age group

Of the 301 survey respondents, 176 (58.5%) completed their library degree in 2004 or later (see Figure 2). The most common completion year was 2007 (17.4%); the reason for this is unknown.
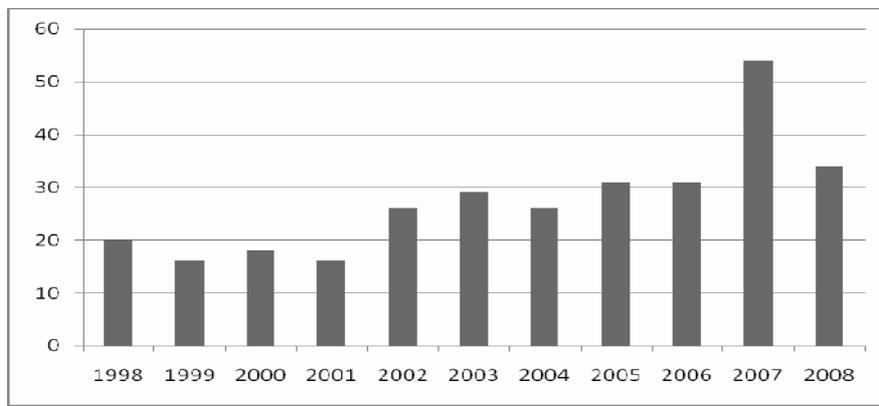

Figure 2: Survey respondents by library degree completion year

Survey respondents from all main Australian library sectors are represented in the survey (see Figure 3). The majority of survey respondents were employed in the public library (114 responses or 38%) or university library (81 responses or 27%) sector. There were very few responses from school librarians (9 responses or 3%).
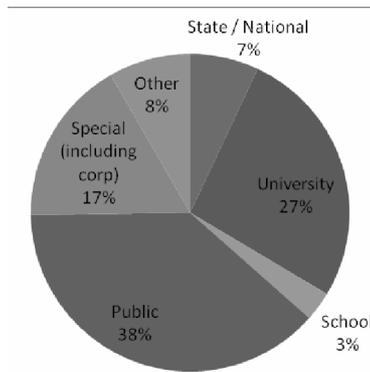
Figure 3: Survey respondents by library sector

Australian government statistics on librarians[5] do not provide a breakdown by library sector, however comparisons can be made with data gathered for a much larger Australian library staff survey (neXus 1) provided by Hallam[21] (see Figure 4). The library management survey elicited a higher response rate for public libraries, a lower response from special and school libraries and a slightly higher response from university libraries.
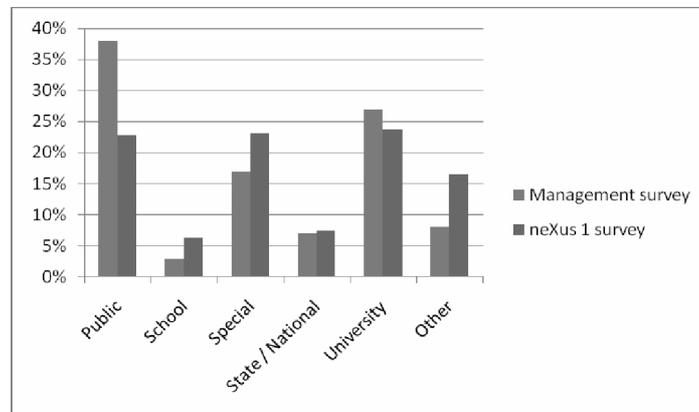

Figure 4: Survey respondents by library sector: comparison
with neXus 1 survey data

Respondents not yet working in management
Of the 301 respondents, 196 (65.1%) reported that they were not currently working in a management role. The most common reason given for not working in a management role was lack of opportunity, followed by not being ready yet and lack of skills (see Figure 5).
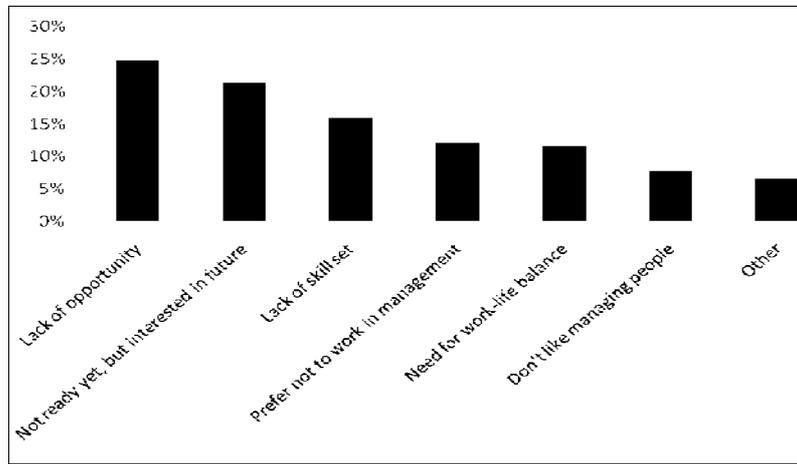
Figure 5: Responses to "Why are you not in a management role?"

Of the 196 respondents not working in management, 135 respondents (68.9%) said they would like to work in management in future. The most common reasons provided for this included higher salary, natural progression from current position, the desire to contribute to decision making and to undertake interesting and challenging work.

Of the 196 respondents not working in management, 61 respondents (31.1%) said they would not like to work in management in future. Reasons provided for this included not being "suitable" for a management role, a desire to maintain work-life balance, and preference to undertake "librarian" work rather than the tasks associated with being a manager.

Respondents working in management

Of the 301 survey respondents, 105 respondents (34.9%) reported that they were currently working in a management role. Of these 105 respondents, 93 (88.6%) were either mostly or completely satisfied in their role. A small number (12 or 11.4%) were not at all satisfied in their role. Reasons provided for this included not enough time to accomplish management tasks due to too many conflicting priorities, stress, and feeling too far removed from the librarian role.

Of the 105 respondents currently working in management, 7 respondents (6.7%) wanted to move out of a management role and 21 respondents (20.2%) said they were unsure whether they would stay in a management role. Reasons provided for this included lack of satisfaction with current position, the desire for work-life balance, and dissatisfaction relating to the management of staff.

Of the 105 respondents currently working in management, 65 respondents (61.9%) said they would recommend library management to others. Another 31

respondents (29.5%) said they may recommend it. Many respondents qualified their response to say that not everyone is "management material".

Of the 105 respondents currently working in management, 9 respondents (8.6%) said they would not recommend library management to others as the pay does not compensate for the increased responsibility and not everyone is suitable or has the capacity to be a manager.

Management training

Overall, 120 of the 301 survey respondents (39.9%) had attended some form of management training. Of the 105 survey respondents already working in management roles, 31 (29.5%) had not attended any management training.

NEW LIBRARIANS AND MANAGEMENT FOCUS GROUPS

An e-mail was sent to Western Australian librarians seeking volunteers to attend a focus group to further explore some of the findings from the survey and literature review. Six librarians attended a focus group in January 2009 at the University of Western Australia Library. The participants had all graduated with a librarian qualification sometime between 2000 and 2007. Four of the attendants worked in academic libraries and 2 worked in the state library sector. Only 1 of the 6 participants was currently acting in a management role, although another had some supervisory responsibility.

Participants were asked what traits or skills were required to be a successful manager. As expected, responses included management skills such as organisational and financial and the ability to present evidence, however participants felt that today's manager also needed a number of leadership skills. These included the ability to create a vision, be inclusive, and be able to "bring a team along with you."

The 5 participants not working in management roles all expressed an interest in doing so in future. The only participant currently acting in a management role said that she were not initially interested in moving into management because she preferred dealing with clients. However, when a three-month secondment became available, she was encouraged to apply by a colleague.

Participants were asked what they thought might discourage librarians from management roles. All participants agreed that there were some librarians who would prefer to "touch every book" than to have a more strategic role. Others perceive management as too much work for little reward and would prefer not to have the responsibility. Some participants said that they know librarians who are satisfied in their current position and are "afraid" of management. Comments included:

> I think a lot of librarians love what they do, whether it's in technical services, or working with the public, they like doing what they do and I think they're more

afraid that if they become a manager that they're not going to be able to touch every book in the library and they're not going to be able to talk to every person that comes in and that's a barrier for a lot of people. They like what they do and they like managing themselves in what they do, but to take them out of that is very uncomfortable.

I have a colleague...who is one of the most organised people I have ever worked with...she's now...acting in a management role and she can't deal with the volume of what's pushed down to her.

All participants agreed that not everyone can be a manager, and that there were some librarians who are not suited to management because they find it difficult to see the bigger picture or deal with conflicting priorities. The majority of the participants in the focus group felt that there were plenty of opportunities available to move into library management in Perth (the capital city of Western Australia), but there were fewer opportunities in regional areas.

All participants said they would move outside of their current sector to obtain a management opportunity, although most of them would actually prefer to stay within their own sector, either because "that's what they know" or "it's a fabulous sector to work in."

Participants were asked for their thoughts on how to encourage librarians to aspire to management positions. Strategies suggested included mentoring, ensuring that a positive image of management is modelled, continuing with the Stepping into Management program (outlined below), continuing with the Aurora Leadership Institute,[22] and providing on the job training and development opportunities.

DISCUSSION

The research conducted for this paper demonstrates that there are many new Australian librarians who are willing to take up the challenge of library management. Of the 301 new librarian who completed the survey, 240 (79.7%) were either already working in, or were interested in library management. Most of those already working in management roles (88.6%) were either mostly or completely satisfied in their role and 91.4% would or may recommend library management to others.

Despite this, a number of themes have emerged from the 896 survey comments which demonstrate the importance of ensuring strategies are in place to encourage librarians to consider a career in management. It is clear that librarians need to be given opportunities to develop the relevant experience and skills to enable them to, firstly decide if management is right for them and secondly (if required), enable them to successfully transition into management.

The importance of role models

A strong theme that emerged from the survey and focus group was the importance of role models. There were a number of comments which illustrate the positive impact a role model can have, for example:

> I've recently realised I want to be a manager... I left library school and never thought I'd want to manage anything at all, but it's working with the people who are managers and having a real feeling for what they do and respect for what they do and the way that they do it that has engendered that for me.
>
> I have a fabulous manager at the moment and she is someone who would inspire me [to go into management].

However, there were many more comments which demonstrate the detrimental impact a role model can have, for example:

> I see so few inspirational examples of managers, especially senior managers in my organisation, there is such a lack of good role models that management does not sell itself as an exciting option to me.
>
> Managers at my library regularly work many hours of unpaid overtime, including weekends. This is not an attractive prospect.
>
> I would be interested if it was the right role but even my manager has told me 'don't go into management' because it is very hard to please everyone and he feels he's the middleman between the directors and staff.

In order to encourage new librarians to take on management roles, current managers have a responsibility to promote library management in a positive light. Although working long hours and taking work home is necessary from time to time, it's important that the benefits of a career in library management are also promoted to balance the assumption that all managers work hard for little reward. The survey shows that many new current managers are highly satisfied in their role and they should share this satisfaction with new librarians.

Another, somewhat related, theme that emerged in the survey comments was that librarianship does not attract individuals to the profession who are "management material", for example:

> I think to be a manager you need certain business/communication skills in this area that often librarians do not possess.
>
> Perhaps the profession doesn't attract many people who have, or will develop, managerial and leadership skills.
>
> Libraries do not seem to attract people that want / aspire to be managers. Perhaps the types of management opportunities available within our sector need to be better promoted and more widely understood to those considering entering this profession?

Previous research suggests that many librarians "accidentally"[18] or "reluctantly"[23] end up in management roles. As expressed by Baldwin, "a primary means of advancement involves assuming supervisory, managerial, or administrative responsibilities. The nature of one's job is often dramatically transformed by the new tasks, the skills for which are not assumed automatically with the new responsibilities. One result is that good librarians or good staff can become mediocre or even bad managers." [23] There is some probability that the survey respondents who have made the following comments have experienced an accidental or reluctant manager:

> I only have to look up and see that most managers are insecure gutless liars who use management as a way of hiding the fact that they have very little real skills or abilities.
>
> My general impression is that not all management knows how to manage.
>
> I see managers as rather self centered and selfish, quite happy to leave the library in the hands of sometimes incompetent casuals who don't have a background in libraries or much interest.

This reinforces the importance of role models. Librarians who enter into management accidentally or reluctantly can have a detrimental effect on librarians coming up through the ranks. "Librarians who entered the profession with no thought to becoming a manager...need to develop both an enthusiasm and an aptitude for management"[18] or they may promote a negative image and discourage new librarians from aspiring to management positions.

Providing opportunities to develop management skills

The importance of providing opportunities for new librarians to gain the right experience and skills to decide if a career in management is for them and to enable them to successfully transition into management is another strong theme that emerged through analysis of the survey and focus group comments.

A number of survey respondents commented on the lack of opportunities to gain experience in management, for example:

> I find there are no opportunities to gain management skills at my organisation. While I dearly would love to start getting some relevant skills, I don't have any chances.
>
> I find it frustrating to move up the ladder as I don't yet have the right experience but how am I supposed to get that experience without someone taking a chance?

Employers need to look at providing opportunities for librarians to develop management skills and experience. These may include providing acting opportunities when other managers are on leave, ensuring management training is offered, mentoring, and encouraging management and/or leadership development through in-

volvement in professional associations. Those interested in management have a responsibility to seek out these opportunities as well.

Mentoring, whether formal or informal, is a strategy which can be used to encourage new librarians to consider a management career. One survey respondent felt that:

> The next generations of librarians / managers need to be mentored ...otherwise no one will want to move into management.

Once individuals who have management potential have been identified by existing managers, mentoring can help to define the skills needed to transition into management. Mentoring can assist with self-assessment, defining strengths and weaknesses, deciding if a career in management is appropriate and developing and achieving relevant goals.

Management training is important, both for incumbents new to management roles and those interested in moving into this area in future. This was strongly reflected in the survey through a number of comments, such as:

> We need to offer more management training and librarians need to be prepared to do more training to get the higher level positions.
>
> Anyone moving into management needs to develop a distinct skill set, different to what is provided in studying library and information studies.
>
> Most management positions offered require skills that are not offered in a library degree.

Somewhat alarming is the fact that 31 (29.5%) of the 105 survey respondents already working in management had attended no management training. New managers and their employers must ensure adequate management training is provided. In addition, employers should provide on the job training and support for new managers to ensure they develop effective techniques and strategies for managing effectively. One survey respondent made the comment that:

> Management training needs to encompass a larger practical component. It is all very well to tell someone how to conduct a performance review in theory, but to actually have to do so...when you are new at the job is very difficult.

The participants in the survey and focus group also commented on the importance of leadership skills in managing effectively. It is important that leadership programs, such as the Aurora Leadership Institute[22], and other leadership institutes around the world as described by Mason and Wetherbee[24] continue.

Stepping into Management Program

The Stepping into Management Program was piloted in Western Australia in 2008 to address a perceived lack of appropriate training in the library profession for individuals interested in management roles. The initiators of the program were find-

ing that there were fewer applicants for management roles as retirements occurred. Many applicants had limited managerial skills or experience.

The program aimed to inspire librarians to consider a career in library management, encourage individuals to take a proactive approach to their own development, and to increase understanding of the skills required to become a successful library manager.

Twenty-one librarians participated in the course from across all library sectors from a range of age groups. The participants attended three morning or afternoon sessions (4 hours duration) held two months apart. Each highly interactive session featured a range of presentations and panel discussions. The topics covered included expectations, statistics, communicating at the right level and to the right audience, managing budgets and executive expectations, project management, internal politics, marketing, strategic planning, and staff and performance management.

Overall the sessions were rated highly by the participants with a score of 9.1 out of 10 on average for the course meeting or exceeding their expectations. The course participants felt that the course was relevant, stimulating and challenging. Comments included that it was a "wonderful opportunity to gain insight from high achieving practitioners" and it "filled a gap which exists for this type of training". At the end of the training over 80% of participants indicated their desire to become a manager and that they intended to take proactive steps towards achieving this goal.

Based on the pilot, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) have indicated an interest in seeing the pilot progress into a national program run in every state and territory.

CONCLUSION

The research conducted for this paper demonstrates that there are many new librarians interested in moving into management roles in Australia. The survey and focus group indicate that there are a number of factors which can impact on the decision to move into management including role models, mentoring, training, opportunities to gain management experience, and support. Through initiatives, such as the Stepping into Management Program, the library profession can work to ensure there are librarians ready and willing to step into management as retirements occur.

Further planned analysis of the survey results may reveal whether a particular library sector will be more affected by the lack of new librarians wishing to enter management roles in future. Further analysis will also look specifically at the "Gen Y" cohort responses to see whether there are generational differences towards the willingness to seek out library management positions.

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