THE CHANGING ROLES OF LIBRARIANS AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WORKPLACE LEARNING IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Elvira Basibas Lapuz
College Librarian II
University Main Library
University of the Philippines
Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
elvira.lapuz@up.edu.ph

Abstract
This study was conducted to determine the effects of technological innovations on academic libraries in the Philippines. Specifically, it sought to examine how these innovations affect the formal organizational structure in the library. It also sought to determine the effects of these changes on human resource management, and on the job requirements, tasks and functions of the library staff. Four academic libraries were included in the study; Ateneo Professional Schools Library, the University of Asia and the Pacific Library, the De la Salle University Library and the Asian Institute of Management Library. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data on library staff opinions regarding the management of change resulting from technological innovations. The number of respondents totalled eighty-six. Findings of the study indicate that changes in organizational structure due to the introduction of technological innovations did take place. The findings also measure the attitude of respondents to the various changes.

Introduction
Libraries are being swept along the currents of rapidly changing technology. While continuing to provide traditional information services, librarians must now develop new skills and assume new roles that are necessary to support technology-based services. A librarian doing collection development tasks must also be concerned with providing access to digitized resources without actually ‘owning’ the resources. Reference librarians must now have the knowledge and skill in accessing online resources to be able to assist their new clients, the remote access users. Technology has its impact in every facet of library work. It has added several new challenges to librarians in achieving their goal of providing excellent information service. Fulfilling this enhanced mission can be difficult, as most libraries are not positioned for rapid change.1

Change by its very nature, is unpredictable, inconstant, and often unmanageable. Organizations need to acknowledge this fact and accept that organizational success nonetheless depends upon their ability to predict and control change in some way. It is not healthy for an organization to just await the outcome of the events and to react to change after it has occurred. An effective organization must be prepared to grasp the opportunities, side by side with the threats, by responding proactively to the challenges posed by change. It is a given that change has become a feature of organizational life and attention to both the positive and negative aspects is essential for an appropriate response.2

The effective management of change is fundamental to a successful and productive organization. Yet the inherent unpredictability of the change dynamic often adds to the challenges facing the management. The literature on change management often suggests that
the changes being experience in the 21st century are altogether more radical than those that occurred in previous centuries. Indeed, according to Handy (1991) in his book *The Age of Unreason*:

We are entering an Age of Unreason, when the future, in so many areas, will be shaped, by us and for us; a time when the only prediction that will hold true is that no predictions will hold true; a time therefore, for bold imaginings in private life as well as public, for thinking the unlikely and doing the unreasonable.\(^3\)

This is a clear suggestion by the author that changes occurring in today’s libraries require not just a change in attitude for library staff it also requires them to see the library in a totally new perspective.

Academic libraries are no longer composed of paper and print collections. Whereas previously libraries were largely storage facilities for books, they have now been transformed into highly sophisticated information facilities. In the Philippines academic libraries are capitalizing on the benefits of the latest information technologies. Taking into consideration the effects of these technologies, library administrators are faced with the challenge of being able to manage the day-to-day activities of the library and of identifying their current and future needs. There are now libraries, especially in highly urbanized areas that have automated their operations. Services are improved by acquiring not only print but also electronic and online resources. There are also initiatives in updating staff knowledge concerning the use of these resources, in order for them to provide efficient and effective services. The effort to improve staff performance is evident in the continuous conduct of seminars, conferences, workshops and training both for the professional and clerical levels.

This changed scenario in Philippine librarianship provided the rationale for this study. The study was undertaken in order to assess the changing nature of academic librarianship in the country. It sought to provide a platform for a discussion on the changes that have occurred and how effectively library staff have adapted to these changes. An outcome of the study is that it provides recommendations based on the changing roles of librarians and information specialists and their need for continuing professional development. It further makes recommendations on the place of workplace learning activities within the library.

**Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study were:

1. To find out how the introduction of technology has changed the formal organizational structure of these libraries, as well as the informal dynamics by which library staff members accomplish and coordinate their tasks.
2. To be able to determine the effects of these changes on the identified roles and tasks of professional and support staff of the library.
3. To be able to determine the continuing professional development needs and requirements of library staff owing to these changed roles and tasks.
4. To be able to recommend work-based learning activities for both professional and support staff.

**Significance of the study**

This study is a presentation of how the members of the academic library staff adapt to changes in the nature of their work tasks and assignments as brought about by the introduction of technological innovations. It explores the strategies and techniques used by library managers to solve the problems following from the changes that occurred in their organization. The findings of this study therefore provide the basis for the recognition that human elements of change are as important as technological innovations. It seeks to
strengthen the argument that “staff training and development are critical to the success of managing change in the library.” Just as important is the evaluation and the impact it has on the staff’s ability to provide quality service. It is believed that human resource development is one of the most important management functions.

More specifically, this study identifies the specific topics to be included in the design of a staff training and development program in terms of perceived importance by the library staff themselves. This will facilitate the development of appropriate training for the library staff to keep them abreast of the latest developments in library and information technologies. It will also assist library managers in determining the current and anticipated needs of the staff to ensure they will continue to provide efficient and effective library services. Results of this study will provide data for library managers to benchmark their future plans and efforts. They can capitalize on the experiences of these libraries that are well advanced in terms of automation and technological innovations when planning for better staff development strategies in their respective libraries.

Research design

This study is descriptive in nature, getting background information from available documents and providing discussion of theories and concepts related to the presentation of the library as an open system and dynamic organization. Employing the descriptive method of research, this study examined the process of technological innovations at the Ateneo Professional School Library, Asian Institute of Management Library, De la Salle University Library and the University of Asia and the Pacific Library to validate the findings in developed western countries concerning the effects of technological change on academic libraries. These academic institutions and their libraries are considered to be among the most technologically-advanced in Metro Manila. Interviews with the chief librarians of the institutions provided information on the more recent developments in their libraries.

The resources of the four libraries were examined, and staff perceptions regarding the use of computers and other technology were evaluated. After examining the institutional settings in which these technological changes occurred, data were collected to assess;

1. the changes in the responsibilities inherent in specific positions,
2. the changes in specialization and skills required for library staff,
3. the changes in decision-making prerogatives and professional duties among the staff.

A survey of staff opinion regarding automation and computerization provided for background information regarding their views, sentiments and attitudes toward change in organizational structure and library management. Data on the perceived training and development needs of each type of personnel was also taken from this survey.

Respondents of the study are the library staff, both professional and non-professional, of the four libraries studied.

Research instrument

Questionnaire. An ‘opinionnaire’ was designed using some items from a study conducted by Peggy Johnson in 1991.4 The questionnaire was structured to collect data on library staff’s perceptions of change management, automation and provision of training programs in their respective libraries. The first part provides for the personal backgrounds of the respondents, and the second part focused on staff opinions regarding technological innovations applied in their libraries. These are questions that require respondents to take note of the frequency of occurrence and the actual situations of their libraries. The third part of the questionnaire lists topics that might be included in a training and development program, and
respondents were asked to rank their importance taking into consideration their individual needs.

**Interviews.** Two of the chief librarians from the four libraries were asked to participate in an interview schedule designed to strengthen the validity of the data gathered using the questionnaire.

**Data collection**
To collect data for this study, the questionnaires were collected several days after they were distributed to the library staff of the four institutions. The Chief Librarians had been requested to distribute the questionnaires to their library staff. Since the population under study was relatively small, the study aimed for a one hundred percent (100%) rate of return, but circumstances did not allow for this. Reasons cited for the non-return or non-completion of questionnaires included that staff were:

- attending a training/seminar/conference,
- too busy during the time of the survey,
- not willing to answer any questions about his/her work at the library.

**Findings, conclusions and recommendations**
The findings of the study were based on the results of the questionnaires answered by the respondents. To present the frequency distribution, percentage and rank, descriptive statistics was used. The chi-square was used to test relationship of the variables.

The following are the findings of the study:

Based on the interviews conducted with the two Chief Librarians, they identified the major changes in their libraries as either organizational or technological. Organizational changes are those concerning hierarchy and distribution of tasks within the library. Specifically, these are the changing organizational structure requiring the creation or abolition of certain section or departments or merging with other units within the institution. Technological changes are those information technology enabled innovations such as integrated library systems, access to electronic and online information sources, etc. These innovations have resulted in changes to the nature of tasks and functions performed by staff.

When asked how the staff responded to these changes and how easily these changes have been accepted, responses revealed that organizational changes had been harder to cope with. Interview with one of the Chief Librarians confirmed this observation. According to her, extra efforts were exerted to put an emphasis on the rationalized and harmonized organizational structuring. As a manager she had to ensure that those affected by these changes are able to cope and continue to be effective and efficient members of the library staff.

When asked to rate their library’s progress towards automation the majority of both the professional (27 or 67.5%) and support staff (33 or 71.4%) thinks that the pace is ‘just right’. This implies that library staff do not see the changes resulting from automation as being unmanageable and that they are able to keep pace with these changes. A majority of both professional (38 or 95%) and support staff (35 or 76%) believe that technological innovation ‘leaves people more free to be creative’. This again indicates a positive perception from the staff with regards to the changing nature of the academic library and suggests that they see it as an opportunity to find new methods and techniques to adapt to the changing nature of their tasks in the library.

There have been changes in the formal organizational structure of the libraries included in the study. Data gathered from the interviews of the two Chief Librarians revealed that although there are no major changes in the hierarchical structuring within the library,
evidence of increased coordination with other departments – for example, the IT department - is clearly present. A slight majority of the respondents (50 or 58%) think that these changes are created by the technological innovations introduced in their libraries. These observations were validated by the Chief Librarians. Specific examples include the introduction of an integrated library system which created a more interlinked distribution of tasks and functions in both the technical and user services division of the library.

In the respondents’ opinion, the cataloging aspect of library work benefited the most from technological applications. According to one of the Chief Librarians the technical aspects of library work received the most benefits from the electronic and online information sources. Specific examples included the use of electronic and online bibliographic tools and integrated library systems. According to the two Chief Librarians, the libraries have become increasingly involved in decision making with regards to the various technologies introduced to the library. The academic library has been working in close cooperation with the information technology unit of the University, although no convergence or merging had occurred.

The opinion of the library staff that there were changes in the library organizational structure was further validated with the responses taken during the interview wherein Chief Librarians described the changed organizational structure of the library. They presented a picture of a library with a leaning towards a flatter or more horizontal organization, with lesser number of middle managers. In the past, libraries have tended to a very hierarchical structure. This no longer holds true, at least for the academic libraries studied that were described as moving towards a flatter structure.

A majority of both the professional (37 or 92.5%) and support staff (40 or 87%) believes that technological innovations create changes in the nature of their tasks and functions. These include changes in the manner of task performance, i.e. from manual to automated, tasks such as bibliographic searching, materials processing, circulation procedures, bibliographic searching, access to information sources, etc. Because of automation, there had been an increase in the clarity of communication and coordination in all the managerial levels and the different aspects of library work. There has been an increased clarity of communication between the clerical and middle management staff, between the middle and upper management staff and the technical and readers’ services staff. When asked about the staff level of involvement in decision making concerning the incorporation of technological innovations in their library, forty nine (49 or 57%) of the respondents said that they are involved in decision making while thirty seven (43%) are not involved at all. A substantial majority (74 or 86%) believes that library staff should be more involved in decision making. Specific instances requiring staff consultation were said to include decision-making regarding equipment to be added to the library and decisions on which information sources will prove to be cost effective.

According to the Chief Librarians interviewed, there have been changes in the requirements for library staff. Sound computing knowledge is now essential. Even those who had been with the library for some years and were considered experts in all the manual procedures are expected to learn and be able to use newly introduced electronic devises. When staff were asked about the effect of technological innovations on their work performance, the results reveals that a majority of library staff think that these innovations create positive effects on their work performance. They cited positive outcomes such as computers making their work easier, and faster and more accurate work production and accomplishments. When asked about learning new technologies, the respondents again, gave positive answers. A clear majority of both professional (37 or 92.5%) and support staff (38 or 83%) ‘look forward to learning’ new technologies.
Findings also revealed that a majority of the respondents have benefited from training provided by their libraries. Respondents reported that the adequacy and quality of training can be described as 'adequate' and 'very good', respectively. When asked how they prefer to learn to use new technologies, answers such as 'in a structured class' and 'workshops' dominated the responses. The majority of the respondents believe that there is a 'great need' for training for all the topics on skills development enumerated as:

1. web page creation
2. use of electronic resources
3. computer hardware
4. computer software
5. information networks i.e., Internet
6. library integrated systems
7. word processing i.e., MS Word
8. spreadsheets, i.e., MS Excel
9. presentations i.e. MS PowerPoint
10. database creation i.e., MS Access
11. basics of personal computers

A majority of the respondents believe that there is a "great need" for training for all the topics on personal development enumerated as:

1. diversity in the workplace – understanding employees
2. performance appraisal
3. coaching and mentoring
4. building teamwork
5. total quality improvement
6. safety and disaster preparedness
7. housekeeping
8. how to build office morale
9. motivating employees
10. interpersonal communications
11. written and oral communications
12. time management
13. planning and organizing
14. handling complaints and grievances
15. decision making and empowerment
16. leadership styles - applications

Based on the assumption that the four libraries included in the study are among the more technologically-advanced learning institutions and applying the technological innovations in their day-to-day activities, this study arrived at the following conclusions:

1. The Chief Librarians interviewed presented their views regarding a horizontal or flatter structure that provides for more efficiency and effectiveness. These were evident in the unchanging number of managerial levels in the present library structure. Through this structuring, redundancies were eliminated in order to be more responsive to the changing needs and create opportunities for continued learning and skills development.

2. The importance of communication and thorough orientation cannot be over-emphasized in order to maintain a properly functioning organization. This is more important during times of change when people feel uncertain and
insecure. A good communication between managers and staff is a significant factor in the effective management of change.

3. Library staff members were positive in their views on the introduction of new technological innovations in the library. They also welcomed the ideas of the changing nature of library work.

4. Library staff looked forward to learning new technologies in the workplace.

5. Library staff wanted to be more involved in decision-making with regards to the introduction of new technologies in the library.

6. The topics enumerated for inclusion when developing training for skills and personal developments were all considered to be of great importance.

Based on the findings of this study and from the available literature related to the study, the author recommends the following:

1. Library managers should be aware of the changes occurring in their library, whether it is organizational or technological. They should be cognizant of the effects of these changes to the organizational structure and the nature of tasks and functions of the library staff.

2. In order to implement change efficiently, managers should be able to prioritize the needs of their staff with regard to job satisfaction, motivation, and job design and requirements. Limitations include restrictions brought about by the very nature of library organizational structures that are by nature too rigid and bureaucratic. This is one of the reasons why a flatter or a more horizontal structure is recommended for an academic library setting. This kind of structuring is more flexible, giving the staff the opportunity to be more creative in the performance of their duties and consequently be more productive members of the organization.

3. Better understanding of the concept of the learning organization culture will help library managers in their efforts to manage change in the library. It answers the challenge of continued excellence in the face of constant change. A learning organization is an organization that continually provides for innovations and can recreate itself as the needs of its clientele change.

4. Based on the responses given, library staff welcomed the idea of continued learning and actually considered all the training topics enumerated to be of great importance. This was one concrete basis for the development of a comprehensive training program for the library staff.

5. Library managers should investigate the possibility of providing work-based learning activities for the staff in order to ensure that efforts are being exerted in enhancing skills and personal development of the staff. A good discussion of the different work-based learning activities is included in the work of Barbara Allan, including such activities as mentoring, benchmarking, coaching etc.

6. Follow-up studies are recommended in the specific areas. These include organizational structuring; the exact nature of new tasks and functions brought about by the introduction of technological innovations in the academic library; the identification of specific training needs of both the professional and support staff, and the development of training modules and work-based learning.
References