

# Editorial

## Library Management and Technology



The focus of my January 1999 *C&RL* editorial was on leadership for academic libraries.<sup>1</sup> Based on the positive e-messages and letters I have received, my observations and questions on this topic apparently struck a nerve. Indeed, because of this editorial, I was invited to be the keynote speaker at a library conference. It is encouraging to see that librarians and information professionals are now more willing to talk about leadership issues. Such was not the case only a few years ago. For some unknown reasons, although academic libraries have been described as being well managed and “underled,” librarians have not talked or written about leadership.

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In the January editorial, it was not my intent to downplay the role and importance of management. Obviously, leadership and management are not the same but, instead, are two different hemispheres. Management focuses on doing things right; leadership implies doing the right things. Efficiency is associated with management, and effectiveness is more aligned with leadership. Although management and leadership may be perceived as two different boughs of the same tree, they are both very important.

Owing to scarce resources, academic librarians, of necessity, must be good managers. With user expectations exceed-

ing existing library resources, library managers must manage intelligently and strategically to provide the best services possible to current and future users. Creativity should not be considered off-limits to managers; quite the contrary, they should be encouraged to use their creative skills to the hilt. Numerous opportunities are available to library managers to engage in creative endeavors that would result in improved service, streamlined operations, and, ultimately, a more efficient library.

### Forgotten Species

Academic libraries, like many other service organizations, tend to forget, or not give priority to, managers at the department head level. It is not uncommon to discover an excellent reference librarian being promoted to head of the reference department or an excellent cataloger being promoted to head of the cataloging department based primarily on his or her respective experience as a practicing librarian. And then, lo and behold, such individuals discover that there is little or no correlation between their librarian skills and the duties and responsibilities expected of them in their role as department head, and they are left to swim or sink. The department head is one of the most important managers in any library, yet department heads are given very little training and preparation to perform their managerial work well. Library directors should recognize the value of the department head and invest more in the improvement of the managerial skills needed by individuals filling this position.

### Technology: The Management Enabler

Nearly all components of library management have been enhanced by modern technology. Numerous examples can be listed to show how technology has improved planning, organizing, staffing, budgeting, and communicating. Computers are effective tools for developing planning scenarios, establishing methods to assist with benchmarking, creating useful budget spreadsheets, and forecasting expectations in the library's future. Technology can play a pivotal role in the library manager's daily work because library managers tend to work within defined bounds of known quantities, using well-established techniques to accomplish predetermined ends.

Perhaps the area of communication has realized more benefits from technology than any other component of management. Technology has enabled library managers to vastly improve their communication with superiors, coworkers, subordinates, and others. The use of listservs and electronic mail has resulted in a significant improvement in efficiency in communication. Listservs have enabled librarians to keep current with best practices in their respective areas of expertise, and e-mail has reduced the communication time cycle immeasurably. If we were to compare how many meetings were held and how long the postal system took to deliver a letter prior to e-mail, it would be easy to reaffirm this technology's many positive impacts. However, some will argue that e-mail has further depersonalized communication by removing human interaction, an argument that it is difficult to deny. On the other hand, however, why should one have to go through the

process of scheduling a meeting that may last thirty minutes to an hour when the entire communication process could be handled via e-mail in less than three minutes? Thirty-three years ago, Peter Drucker wrote: "Meetings are by definition a concession to deficient organization. For one either meets or one works. One cannot do both at the same time."<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusion

Evolving technology is making the library manager's job easier. Efficiency is being greatly improved. It is not difficult to find several examples of how productivity has improved as a result of technology. Managers now have more people reporting to them due to the improved communication linkage via technology; thus, there has been some movement from hierarchy to flatter organizations. Moreover, technology is enabling professionals to inject more creativity in their daily work. Paraprofessionals now can handle many of the routine tasks (such as copy cataloging) by using online cataloging facilities.

Decision making is an important part of any library manager's job. Indirectly and directly, technology has made the decision-making process less complex. Managers are much better informed today than only a few years ago. Simulation and scenario building are becoming more common in today's library manager's repertoire. However, we should not expect a machine to replace human judgment and intuition. Moreover, the work of the manager does not exist for the sake of the tool; rather, the tool exists for the sake of the manager.<sup>3</sup>

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*Editor*

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### Notes

1. Donald E. Riggs, "Academic Library Leadership: Observations and Questions," *College & Research Libraries* 60 (Jan. 1999): 6-8.
2. Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 44.
3. ———, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York, Harper & Row, 1973), 224.