

Book Reviews



Auster, Ethel, and Shauna Taylor. *Downsizing in Academic Libraries: The Canadian Experience.* Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Pr., 2004. 204p., acid free paper, \$50 (ISBN 0802089755). LC: 2004-276481

Downsizing in Academic Libraries reports the results of a study to document implementation strategies and determine outcomes of downsizing in Canadian libraries. The study covers fifteen academic years from 1982 to 1998.

The 1990s was a period of declining government support for higher education in Canada. Canadian academic libraries had to manage cutbacks while, at the same time, campus enrollments were increasing, materials costs were rising, and the purchasing power of the Canadian dollar was falling. Although the study was conducted in the twenty-six libraries that hold membership in the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), their experiences are not uniquely Canadian; U.S. libraries have managed a similar set of problems.

In the 1960s, managers were hired for their abilities to manage growth. In the 1970s and 1980s, declining resources demanded that managers implement short-term strategies, such as cutting serials, increasing dependence on interlibrary loan (ILL), reducing hours, developing cooperative relationships with other libraries, and so on. There was still an optimism that the days of abundance would return. By the 1990s, it was accepted that libraries must change more fundamentally. This book examines those efforts.

The authors briefly summarize general management literature on downsizing. They identify downsizing strategies—work force reduction, work redesign, and systemic organizational change. Each strategy is described and its impact on the individual and organization is assessed. Each then is examined in the library context.

Not surprisingly, the research concludes that work force reduction is the most disruptive strategy. The public sector, which includes libraries, generally adopts less draconian strategies, such as attrition and early retirement options, to achieve work force reduction. Nonetheless, negative impacts are serious. Impacts described in the literature include a loss of knowledge and skills as experienced personnel leave and a reduction in new ideas and the capacity for innovation because of fewer new hires. It is also observed that those who remain—the survivors—are less inclined toward effort and commitment. Salary freezes, enforced leaves, and job sharing are less commonly adopted in libraries.

Respondents reported that the most commonly used work redesign strategy is to automate work processes. Outsourcing, merging departments, eliminating tasks, and forming teams are popular strategies. Work redesign cannot be implemented quickly; effective implementation requires study and analysis. Overall, libraries used changes related to technology more often than changes related to work or organization change.

Systemic changes that focus on the culture of the organization, including employee development, new performance standards, and reward systems, are the least-used strategies.

The book's greatest contribution is its exploration of downsizing processes, including examinations of participation, communication, and leadership. The survey, which was the basis for the study, queried participants about their involvement in the change process. Respondents reported that they were most engaged in decisions about new services, redesign of work processes, and so on. But they felt only marginally involved in broader

decisions such as designing training programs, developing the overall downsizing plan, and creating new performance measures. Overall, the downsizing process has been marked by poor leadership on the part of senior management and by highly centralized decision making.

The most common responses to downsizing reported are to close or reduce hours in branches or specialized reading rooms and to cutback services such as tours, one-on-one consultation, mediated searching, current faculty profiles, and telephone reference. The professional staff devotes less time to materials selection, and the quality of the collection declines. Libraries become dependent on approval plans, outsourcing, and purchased rather than local systems. Low-level cataloging and lack of authority control decrease access to the collection. In administrative areas, professional development and communication vehicles, such as staff newsletters, are cut when they are needed most. Librarians find themselves doing more clerical work. Changes lead to stress, lower morale, and decreased collegiality. The process devalues what librarians in both public and technical services have always thought was important and to which they have devoted their careers.

Technology, though part of the solution, is also part of the problem. Respondents to the survey argue that the introduction of a wide variety of technologies, often running simultaneously, increased the need for instruction, one-on-one reference, and the maintenance of good working relationships with faculty. The technologies themselves also demand that librarians spend time on new tasks such as searching Web sites, managing the acquisition of electronic resources, negotiating licenses, and distributing passwords.

The presentation of these survey responses implies that respondents attribute these changes to downsizing, the result of decreased funding. In fact, the world did not change because of budget

cuts. User habits and user expectations evolve with the introduction of each new technology, and it is imperative that libraries and librarians evolve at the same pace. It might be argued that downsizing affected the ability of libraries to respond to change with a ready and coherent design for training and services. Alternatively, one might argue that were it not for downsizing, the imperative to change at all would be diminished. Would we have increased staff in order to maintain traditional cataloging, acquisition, and reference services? Many of the problems described by respondents to the survey are better addressed by library educators and administrators than by those who control the purse strings.

Overall, respondents expressed confidence and enthusiasm to meet the challenges of new technologies. However, the summary of opinion is that radical change was not met with good management. They report that decision making is too centralized, communication poor, and downsizing haphazard rather than rational and planned. The needs for counseling and job re-training have been poorly addressed. Management's handling of downsizing is the greatest problem; there is a distrust of leadership.

Downsizing in Academic Libraries is an excellent study for administrators who manage change. The most important finding of the study is the desperate need for transformational leadership. Leadership influences employee attitudes and organizational climate. Management must make the required changes intelligible, clarify the purpose of downsizing, and provide support for the process. It is also necessary to involve employees in the process and to improve communication.

Downsizing in Academic Libraries makes excellent use of charts and graphs, especially in a chapter contributed by Donna Chan, which presents a statistical overview of Canadian academic research libraries. References to previous management studies are well documented; the bibliography and index are thorough

and well done.—*Janita Jobe, University of Nevada, Reno.*

Beinhart, Larry. *The Librarian.* New York: Nation Books, 2004. 432p. \$15.95 (ISBN 1560256362). LC: 2004-303800.

This taut, well-written political thriller has everything one might expect of the genre, including conspiracies, dirty tricks, covert operatives, secret assignments, car chases, and more, spiced throughout with dark humor and plentiful doses of sex, violence, and profanity. What makes this thriller different is that the central character, David Goldberg, is an academic librarian. After providing a brief synopsis of the plot, I will focus on three questions: How does Beinhart portray librarianship and librarians? What impact does Goldberg's role as a librarian have on his behavior? Will academic librarians who read this book find any special insights into their profession?

Despite a number of twists and turns, the overall plot of this thriller is relatively simple. At the request of a female colleague, Elaina Whisthoven, whom he recently fired due to budget cuts, David Goldberg, director of library services at an unnamed academic library, agrees to take her place for a few evenings on a project to scan, organize, and index the papers of aging businessman Alan Carston Stowe, a conservative billionaire who desires to leave his records to posterity as a memorial to his greatness. What Goldberg does not know is that Elaina is being hounded by a shadowy group of covert operatives loosely connected with Homeland Security. They are concerned that Stowe's papers might include clues to an ongoing conspiracy to steal the upcoming election for the incumbent Republican president if it begins to look like the Democratic candidate has a chance to win. Their suspicions turn to Goldberg, who quickly becomes a fugitive. Using his skills as a librarian and lots of luck, along with the aid of several unlikely compatriots, including two female librarians and the wife of one of the covert operatives, Goldberg

finally discovers what the conspirators are trying to hide. In the final chapters, their conspiracy is put into motion, although Goldberg and his colleagues are able to slow things down enough that the final result of the conspiracy is in doubt as the novel ends.

How does Beinhart portray librarianship and librarians? On the one hand, he incorporates several themes that reflect important aspects of modern librarianship, including the stress librarianship places on preserving, organizing, and disseminating information. Goldberg is clearly concerned with these issues as he begins his work on the Stowe papers. Beinhart also calls attention to the value librarians place on freedom of information. In addition, he portrays librarians as computer experts and exceptionally skilled researchers. The implication seems to be that no one but a librarian could have done what Goldberg accomplished. Above all, Beinhart stresses the point that librarians love books.

On the other hand, Beinhart sometimes portrays librarians in a less positive vein. Elaina Whisthoven is doughty, shy, and retiring. Goldberg comes across as a bookish nerd and clearly has difficulties dealing with the opposite sex. Inga Lokisberg, identified as the head librarian at the university, although clearly lower in rank than Goldberg, is a former exchange student with a rather checkered sexual history. And Susan Cohen-Miller, an acquaintance of Goldberg who works at the Library of Congress, is an ardent feminist with a rather unhealthy, ambivalent attitude toward men, including Goldberg. Also, Beinhart makes great play out of the idea that librarians are underpaid but are willing to remain so because of their love for books, despite the implication that part of Goldberg's motivation for working on the Stowe archives was the extra income.

What impact does Goldberg's role as a librarian have on his behavior? Given its title, one might be led to believe that his role would be a central focus of this novel.