Education for Careers in Information Management

Introduction and Executive Summary of Key Points
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In November 1992, an article appeared in <u>Corporate Library Update</u> describing a new course that was to be offered at Boston University in Corporate Information Resource Management. The article was entitled, "New Course to Empower Librarians in IT/IS Age." It really struck a chord. The author of this paper was given as the contact person for the course and was immediately the recipient of numerous phone calls from librarians around the country. All of them were seeking a path to playing a more active and important role in the information work of their organizations. To a person, each emphasized that the training they need to do was not available in any courses or degree programs to which they have access. Incidentally, all were from major metropolitan areas that have library schools.

This states the case dramatically. Librarians know that they could be, should be, might be, or would like to be key players in corporate information management planning. They just don't know what they have to bring to the table or what they need to know to be players. Many want or expect a leadership role but are hesitant to seek it without credentials or being given the authority to take leadership. Some who want a leadership role aren't equipped personally to manage it, but many are. Some won't be leaders of information management teams but can be productive members with valuable knowledge and expertise to contribute.

Frequently, the author is a participant in group discussions where librarians are trying to fulfill their own departmental needs for an automated system. She observes the group dynamic between them and other professional groups. Usually, the group can be divided into three types: business managers, MIS or data processing, and librarians/information specialists. The knowledge that librarians lack has become predictable and sometimes embarrassing. It is not their fault, but it is painful to observe them struggling with concepts in which much of the business world is fluent. [Note 2009: the numbers of special librarians who are now at the forefront of information technology implementation and development have certainly increased since this was written in 1993. Progress also is being made in graduate programs. However, there still needs to be improvement in their graduate training to continue that trend.]

By the same token, other groups don't really understand what is unique in the expertise of librarians. Librarians are often reticent to do the explaining necessary to help others really understand where they do have expert skills. A vendor should not be doing this job for them.

Perhaps some of the problem rests with the ambiguities in graduate library education. The purposes and goals of librarianship vary dramatically depending on the constituents being served. We have professionals calling for a change in curriculum to train librarians to teach others to be information competent. Some believe library science should merge with computer

science, MIS, or M.B.A. programs. Finally, there are those who feel the problems are with society's perception of librarians and not with the programs at all.

It is this author's position that all points of view can be justified, supported, and met, but not in a single degree called an MLS. Different constituents need different types of information professionals with an underlying background in information science theory and philosophy.

Summary: In the following presentation, questions are posed and then answered with lists of some basic elements that must be considered for relevance depending on the type of library/information center the professional is targeting for future employment.

What needs are not being met by current programs?

- Terminology of information technologies is not well defined. It doesn't become part of the vocabulary of graduating professionals.
- Knowledge of IS/IT is riddled with wrong or outdated information.
- Graduates leave school with no hands-on experience with anything resembling a comprehensive information system.
- Methodologies are presented as permanent solutions with no recognition of the transient nature of new technologies.
- Graduates leave school with no understanding of the roles and expertise of other information professionals with whom they will have to coordinate information strategies.
- Systems analysis course work is neglected.
- Data base design course work is geared to simplistic systems.
- Professionals are not being trained for a specific branch of librarianship and leave school as generalists poorly equipped for any environment.
- No business courses are required for those entering corporations.
- Subject expertise is not required for those entering special libraries.
- Minimal emphasis is placed on indexing, abstracting, and thesaurus development for those going into special libraries.
- No recruitment of people suited to corporate information management is being actively done by library schools. This results in a pool of graduates who often don't fit into a competitive and fast-paced corporate environment.
- Special Librarians need a different name to go with new professional responsibilities reflecting their role in information and business (e.g. Information Resource Managers).

How should library professionals be trained?

They must all be well grounded in core information science courses:

- Types of resources and their characteristics,
- Collection management and development,

- Information resource content management (Cataloguing, Indexing, Abstracting, Thesaurus Development) [Note 2009: Today this should include a clear understanding of metadata standards, taxonomy development, and specialized indexing for proprietary and specialized content.]
- Reference and research [Note 2009: With emphasis on the "deep Web" and other Internet resources. The nature of content production, media outlets, and rampant content replication calls for a renewed emphasis on the definitions of primary, secondary and tertiary content and the competencies required to analyze the authoritativeness of information resources from sources external to an enterprise.]
- Information distribution systems
- [Note 2009: a renewal of definitions related to classification and categorization, plus ontologies and their role in semantically based technologies.]

Then, depending on their career goals, they should select from among some other courses, which would be offered also in departments of computer science, business administration, and management:

- Human resource management
- Basic data processing, including hardware systems
- Operating systems
- Networking systems [Note 2009: computing platforms]
- Data base design
- Systems analysis and statistics
- Business management
- Retrieval systems and services (public files and services)
- Project management with a focus on Information Technology and Information Systems
- New Information Management Technologies (full text systems, image management, document management systems.) [Note 2009: plus applications including Search engines, Semantic technologies, Business Intelligence and Analytics, and Content Management Systems and how to evaluate them for solutions to information handling problems.]

What are the gaps in library education for corporate library management?

These are largely the result of a failure to segment the graduate library population early in their programs. The most serious areas of concern are with recruitment of the types of people who can succeed in dynamic and highly technical organizations, improving their computer literacy with knowledge about automation concepts that relate not just to libraries but to business information systems, giving students enough background to understand the complexities and dynamics of the corporate world. They must be challenged to think in business terms, and to adopt a creative attitude to meet business needs by developing new methods of handling information instead of focusing on traditional library methodologies.

What are suggestions for alternative degree programs? Various strategies must be examined and evaluated. Among them might be:

- Graduate library programs would all retrench to develop a focus on training for a particular area of librarianship, i.e. academic, special, etc.
- More faculty would be drawn from the field to teach highly specialized and pragmatic courses.
- Programs would have a minimum of two courses with applied practicums in a "real world" library or information center.
- Corporate library/information science programs would be part of an M.B.A. or computer science/MIS degree and would be a two year program.
- Degree programs would be available for systems librarians or data base administrators, which would require substantial course work in indexing, thesaurus development, computer science, data base design, and systems analysis.

The risks are predictable and serious if the field is not revolutionized. Librarians will not be key players in information management. Their knowledge and skills will not be utilized. <u>If they continue to insist on being intermediaries in all phases of information acquisition and searching, they risk being viewed as barriers instead of facilitators</u>. They must share the turf and work with other information professionals. To do this and be effective, they will require more education in technological and business areas.

[Note 2009: The author is still actively engaged with information technologies in the context of enterprise management and systems implementations. It is noteworthy that there are too few professional librarians on business teams as members and rarely as leaders for IT managed projects. They are not represented in strategic roles and not recognized for their expertise among IT staff. At conferences and professional meetings where content management, information systems, knowledge management and collaboration are themes they are a minority; therefore their voices, ideas, and understanding of the issues being discussed are not being heard. This will only be remedied through education, the selection and encouragement of people for graduate programs who are motivated to become leaders in the field, and as peers to IT, taking equal responsibility for content management in a professional capacity. It is critical to encourage and promote those to the profession who will be strong business leaders, bringing their professional knowledge and expertise to the table alongside other management positions.]

This paper was prepared from the authors remarks for a panel presentation at Univ. North Carolina, Chapel Hill in May, 1993. The audience was graduate school faculty, Research Triangle Park CEOs, and students on the state of graduate education for special librarians The program was sponsored by Mead Data Central. It has been updated with the author's comments in November, 2009, for re-distribution by her company, LWM Technology Services, a consultancy specializing in strategies for corporate knowledge management. ©1993, 2009 Lynda W. Moulton