

The risks of getting it wrong

According to a recent OCLC report (Research Libraries, Risk and Systemic Change <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-03.pdf>), research libraries face some major risks. According to the report's authors "the heat is on, and it's intense."

One of the major risk clusters is in the field of human resources, and this set of risks may not be limited to research libraries. Further, these risks feature mostly in the "high impact, high likelihood" zone of the risk graphic.

These are the risks rated "high" by the authors

1. Recruitment and retention of resources
2. Difficulty identifying candidates for evolving library management roles
3. Human resources are not allocated appropriately to provide the training, development, cross-training and re-training required to manage change in the current environment
4. Current human resources lack skill set for future needs (changing technology, etc)
5. Conservative nature of library inhibits timely adaptation to changed circumstances

In the report, the word "resources" is used to refer to people.

Is this a fair summation? What should we be doing? The report looks at ways of mitigating these five major risks, and comes up with restructured workflows as the major strategy for mitigating human resource risks. This is said to mitigate risks 2, 3 and 4, and the remaining two residual risks will be offset by the likelihood of attracting different kinds of people.

Unfortunately our profession shies away from these kinds of issues, people issues. This issue of *inCite*, Building Our Profession, should be all about how interesting it is working in libraries and the information industry now, and how we need to use that to attract the kinds of people we are going to need in the future. Or maybe we should just plunge in and recruit, without being too analytical about it?

The reality is that libraries and other information management roles have changed out of sight over the past decade or two – particularly since the World Wide Web came to Australia in 1994. The Destination Library wiki – see <http://destinationlibrary.pbworks.com/> – has been put together by a group of Victorian librarians to promote work in libraries and the information industry as a career. One of its features is a long list of profiles of people working in our sector, in all their variety. Why are libraries interesting? Libraries are about managing information, and all of the roles which relate to that – providing a service in particular. "Librarians are the original search engines," Destination Library says.

Technology has made organising, managing, finding, and using information much easier, and created great new possibilities. But it still helps to apply skills to the task, and the role of people who have those information management skills is more important than ever.

One of the effects of technology has been to eliminate many of those process jobs which the ignorant regard as characterising library work – archetypically, stamping books. Many of those tasks have been automated, or turned over to the customer, freeing up library staff to do more interesting things.

Destination Library has a nice list of ten reasons to work in a library. To be honest about this list, some of the things might not

apply in all libraries, especially the one about kittens. But it gives you an idea.

The other aspect of working in libraries is the growing variety of options. While they mostly have a common core – organising, managing, finding, and making information available to people – there is growing variety. Destination Libraries has a list of career options. At the same time, work in libraries is attracting people from a wider range of educational backgrounds – computer studies, humanities, and science.

Destination Library is running a careers night on 25 May at the State Library of Victoria. If you are in Melbourne, and think you might be interested in a career in the library and information sector, make sure you are there by 5.30pm.

And finally, a few commonly-asked questions, although after reading the article above, you should know the answers to them all now.

Q: I just don't think libraries are the right job for a Gen X person like me.

Well, perhaps you're right, Gen X person. Librarians of all people hate stereotyping, including generational stereotyping. Libraries are for everyone, and we have always prided ourselves on an equal approach to all comers.

Q: I've always wanted to work in a library – I just love books so much.

Hmm. In the old days, you would have been perfect. Not long ago, you would have been automatically ruled out. Nowadays, we are more balanced, and we know that books have their place, but it certainly isn't all about books.

Q: I would have liked to work in libraries, but unfortunately I've got a business degree.

No problem at all. Business degrees are fine, with all sorts of useful library skills – organisation, money, people skills – now you just need to get a library and information studies graduate diploma or master's degree. Check the ALIA website.

Q: I couldn't work in a library – all those horrible musty old books.

Good news – there are plenty of jobs in libraries where you don't see a book from week to week. You do have to choose the job carefully. Libraries are really about information, organising it and providing it to people. Books are one of many ways of packaging the information.

Q: Libraries – ugh. All that stamping, covering, cataloguing, shelving, and now wandung as well. I couldn't stand it.

Libraries have a lot less process work than they used to, but every job has some, so I can't pretend that we have got rid of it all. Two trends – automation and self-service – have reduced the process work. And a lot of the process work relates to books, which are on the way out. A bit, anyway. Well, a lot in some libraries.

Q: I really want a job where I can use my web skills.

Libraries and web professionals have a lot in common. You should think about working in a library. Both jobs are about organising and managing information, and there is a growing demand for web skills in libraries. The two kinds of jobs meet nicely in the growing number of repositories, or digital libraries.

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