Continuing Professional Development for LIS professionals: Maximizing Potential in an Organizational Context

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Abstract

Library and information science (LIS) professionals must be engaged in continuing professional development (CPD) to ensure their skills, knowledge and capabilities regularly to meet their own objectives and the requirements of employer organizations. This article highlights crucial issues relating to CPD in the interrelated contexts of the individual professional and their employer organization. We address three rhetorical questions: Are we willing to learn? Do we have opportunities to learn? Are we able to apply what we learn? Discussion and recommendations are drawn from relevant literature and grounded in workplace experience. Included are exemplar case studies from a large Australian academic library. Individuals' motivation and learning skill levels have significant impact on CPD effectiveness, as does the organizational learning climate. Professionals and employers jointly bear responsibility for CPD outcomes. LIS professionals should reflect on what motivates them towards continuous learning and organizations must create supportive learning environments. We find that both staff and employers are responsible for sourcing learning opportunities and utilizing effective learning transfer strategies. In this context, we recommend that a deliberate and thoughtful approach to CPD as this will result in increased benefits to LIS professionals and organizations.

Keywords: Continuing professional development, CPD, staff development, librarians, library and information science professionals, learning, RMIT University Library (Australia)

Introduction

Libraries are in the business of learning (Webb, 2012). People come to them to find answers and to explore and develop personally. With the ever-increasing pace of technological change, new media and the vast amount of information produced, it is important for library and information science (LIS) professionals to keep constantly update their knowledge and

skills in order to continue to meet client demands. It is also important for their job satisfaction (Doney, 1998; Cooke, 2012). In affirming the importance of CPD for strengthening knowledge and skills, Hurych (2002, cited in Cooke, 2012, p. 1) additionally stresses the gains it gives in values and attitudes needed for service orientation.

This article poses and addresses three rhetorical questions pertaining to the crucial issue of the continuing professional development (CPD) of LIS professionals. These are:

♦ Are we willing to learn?
♦ Do we have opportunities to learn?
♦ Are we able to apply what we learn?

The focus in this article is practical and grounded in the LIS workplace. Drawing on relevant literature and original case studies set in an academic library context, it addresses the roles of both the individual and the employing organization in ensuring effective practice occurs.

Are we willing to learn?

In the future, where access to accurate and pertinent information is crucial to personal, organizational and societal survival and success, libraries are well positioned to play a key role. Marquardt (2011) states that, organizational survival depends on continuous adaptation "to the environment via speedy, effective learning" (p. 1). It is vital that LIS staff build a strong and growing repertoire of skills and capabilities, enhancing these through exchanging information with colleagues, including in team and whole-of-organization contexts.

Depending on one's viewpoint, the challenge is either daunting, exciting, or an issue to leave for someone else to address. It is crucial that the latter view not prevail. CPD is the joint responsibility of the individual, professional and educational bodies, and employer organizations

(Varlejs, 2006; Leong, 2011). Library and information professionals have a responsibility to commit to professional development and career-long learning. Similarly, their employers and the Australian Library and Information Association have a responsibility to provide opportunities which enable library and information professionals to maintain excellent service delivery. (Australian Library and Information Association, 2005)

The expectation of active pursuit of learning is clear, but what is the reality? Are LIS professionals willing to embrace CPD and what is the role of their employing organization in promoting positive attitudes? Do organizational factors produce motivation or inhibit it?

Personal motivation

Each individual is unique. Some are passionate about their professional work while others place higher priorities on other facets of their life, whether by choice or necessity. There will be individuals who will seek out learning opportunities whether or not they are required to by their organization or a formal professional development (PD) scheme and others who wait for CPD to be delivered to them (Cossham& Fields, 2007). Individuals will benefit from considering what motivates them and, if they are not already doing so, exploring the benefits of a planned approach to professional development.

In reviewing literature on factors affecting participation of librarians in PD, Chan and Auster (2003) found that the motivation to update was vital. Other studies they identified found that "intrinsic benefits of training (e.g., personal satisfaction) and extrinsic benefits of training (e.g., better pay) were significant predictors of participation" (p.268). Individual respondents to a 2005 New Zealand study identified personal satisfaction, salary increase and career progression as the top three

motivating factors for their participation in CPD (Cossham& Fields, 2007). Awareness of one's own motivators may open up new avenues for learning. As members of groups seeking to increase the number and quality of publications and conference or seminar presentations by staff at RMIT University Library, the authors can attest that group participants have found intrinsic motivation through the challenge and satisfaction afforded by self-expression in the context of a supportive group climate. The increased professional reading and research involved in these productive activities resulted in focused learning with no need for external pressure to generate engagement (Sullivan et al., 2013).

Real or perceived barriers to CPD must be overcome. Senior staff may be more proactive about seeking approval to attend training than junior staff (Doney, 1998, p. 489). Those with low expectations may disadvantage themselves by not actively seeking opportunities. Even if funding is not available, alternate pathways can be sought to continue learning. Some are distracted by personal circumstances outside of work and must delay personal development. In this situation colleagues can help by digesting current issues for them and giving one-on-one tailored training as an alternative. A common restraining factor is work load or demands from supervisors (Doney, 1998, p. 489). Professionalism demands that a balance is found between prioritizing current work and CPD. Setting aside a focused time each week to concentrate on PD can increase personal satisfaction and ongoing value to the workplace.

Organizational factors

A positive organizational culture and supportive leaders and managers are vital to promote motivation for learning. It is inspiring to be part of something worthwhile and bigger than ourselves. Marquardt (2011) posits that

linking "increased learning with increased organizational success" (p. 71) is a significant contributor to becoming a learning organization. Blakiston(2011) credits an idea originally discussed by Bruce &Pepitone (1999) saying that:

"The work environment must be one in which people feel that they are making a contribution and that their work and knowledge are appreciated; they also must agree with the organizational values and want the organization to be successful. (p. 734)"

For the organization, the importance of CPD may be seen primarily as a way to ensure access to the capabilities needed to achieve strategic and operational goals (Cossham& Fields, 2007, p.575), but this need not debar meeting individuals' developmental interests. A hard-headed over-emphasis on organizational needs, to the perceived detriment of individuals, is likely to be counter-productive. For example, it may be advantageous to the organization to concentrate on fast-tracking star performers, but this needs to be handled carefully if the approach will disadvantage others or be viewed as inequitable.

Some aspects of the role of the organization in enhancing motivation for learning are included in the following section on opportunities to learn, but it is important to note here that best practice demands that the organization not be passive. Individual staff should take responsibility for their own learning, but the organization can do much to enhance learning and application opportunities through systematic planning, organization, resourcing, and creative provision. Varlejs (1999, cited in Cooke, 2012, p. 6) wrote of the importance of the nature of the work and performance expectations. Managers and supervisors have significant influence in shaping work responsibilities to give meaningful challenges which in turn motivate staff to engage in CPD where needed.

Case 1: A personal reflection on motivators for CPD

> As a new graduate librarian, I commenced working at RMIT University Library in 2007 with a healthy dose of personal motivation; keen to learn and committed to remaining up to date as a professional. However, my motivation may not have remained as strong nor would I have sought all of the opportunities I have, without the confidence of support from the Library. I am fortunate that I am in a workplace that values continuing professional development for the individual and the organization, aligning and managing competing priorities for everyone's benefit. We also have a dedicated Staff Development Librarian, as well as a work planning system that allows us to set professional development goals each year.
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> In-service training has enhanced my skills at the reference desk and orientation to new concepts and technologies such as gamification and photo-sharing have encouraged further investigation. I have participated in special interest groups such as the Library's New Professionals and Getting Published groups, giving me opportunities to engage and collaborate with other staff with similar interests. Secondment to project work in other areas within the Library, and in the wider University, and attending external training on presentation skills, learning design and leadership, have all increased my workplace expertise and confidence.
>
> While my attitude and drive contributed to successful promotion to a new role in the Library, I am sure that these professional development opportunities played a significant part, and will continue to do so as I seek new challenges. A supportive professional development environment that balances the needs of the individual as well as those of the organization can go a long way towards attracting and retaining good staff and it is one of the reasons I have stayed.
>
> **Daniel Giddens**, Reference Librarian

Do we have opportunities to learn?

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning Section identifies best practice principles for LIS CPD. One of these requires that there be a:

> broad range of learning opportunities, both formal and informal; formal offerings in a choice of formats, designed to meet identified needs, in modules structured to cover topics from introductory through advanced. (Varlejs, 2006)

A plethora of opportunities are available, although not necessarily with equal access for all. There is a need to set aside time to explore available options and share these with colleagues. Organizations have a responsibility to prioritize options, to highlight important activities to staff, and to provide solutions to professional development needs where a ready solution is lacking.

CPD pathways

There are many available pathways to gaining new skills and capabilities. Familiar approaches include academic courses, in-house or external training, and conferences and seminars. In addition to in-house lists of training and recommended external courses, sources to locate training include scanning offerings from regional and national professional associations (such as the American Library Association options at http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advleg/federallegislation/govinfo/egovernment/egovtoolkit/training) and joining mailing lists

from private training, conference and seminar providers. Consider looking beyond LIS providers for other relevant fields such as leadership and instructional design. These options range from free to prohibitively expensive. There are many inexpensive pathways that Blakison (2011) and Smallwood et al. (2013) are recommended sources for suggestions. Online communities such as WebJunction (http://www.webjunction.org), microblogs such as Twitter (https://twitter.com/), the TED talks (http://www.ted.com/talks) and online conferences such as Library 2.013 (http://www.library20.com/2013) are 'free' as may be personal reading, webinars, unconferences, and MOOCs (which can be located on the MOOC List, http://www.mooc-list.com/). A number of online offeringsare scheduled to suit the North American audience, but in many cases the sessions are recorded and accessible later either directly or via registration. Other options can be assessed any time or over several days or weeks. When using free or fee-based resources, the learning may be enhanced by viewing and discussing the material with other colleagues.

Individual responsibility

Each person's CPD needs are unique, at least to some extent. It is vital to take responsibility for one's own CPD planning after considering personal goals, current strengths and skills, skill gaps, and current and future job requirements. Cooke (2012) discusses self-directed learning and also personal learning networks which are described as "a learner and the contacts and colleagues with whom they surround themselves" (p. 7), whether face-to-face or remotely. Many professionals also advocate having a mentor or mentors. This can be through a formal program such as one run in 2013 for staff of the State Library of Victoria and academic libraries in Victoria, Australia.

Where a formal program is not available it is useful for individuals to look for mentors and/or coaches. This can involve different mentors for specific purposes and circumstances. The arrangements can be explicit or, at times, the mentor may be unaware that the individual is observing them for that purpose.

Organizational factors

As the effectiveness of LIS organizations is largely dependent on the capabilities and positive motivation of the workforce, it is incumbent on managers to facilitate a supportive learning climate. Learning must be valued and utilized and this involves providing time and resources. IFLA's Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning Section (Varlejs, 2006) sees good practice as providing about 10% of work hours "for attendance at workshops, conferences, in-service training, and other educational activities, and for informal learning projects". Determining an appropriate budget for staff development needs is difficult and dependent on circumstances; however, 2% of the personnel budget is offered as a reasonable goal by the IFLA Section.

A facet of staff development where organizations readily accept their responsibility is the induction of new employees. This area requires careful attention to ensure staff members are able to perform confidently and effectively in a short timeframe. The thoroughness of an induction program is significant to new employees as evidenced anecdotally by many stories of dismal failure. Organizations also usually recognize an obligation to ensure training for key skills is available. Unfortunately action may be ad hoc, inequitably distributed or short-sighted. An example of a successful in-service training (IST) program for front of house staff, which ensures ongoing refreshers and skill building for core work, is illustrated in Case 2 below.

Case 2: RMIT University Library in-service training

> As an in-service training (IST) co-ordinator at RMIT University Library, I am responsible for organizing and delivering ongoing training for staff. Library staffs with expertise have the opportunity to deliver training sessions, imparting their knowledge and skills to other staff. Session presenters are required to prepare a lesson plan which is stored centrally so that future sessions can be delivered by others. A benefit of doing this is to avoid re-inventing the wheel and for staff to develop skills in how to write lesson plans, documenting what they do on a daily basis.
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> Regular sessions are delivered throughout the year including: specific database sessions and refresher training sessions on topics such as reference interview skills, loans, resources for specific academic schools overviews, and EndNote. To ensure learning takes place, these involve hands-on activities and instructional information. It is also an opportunity for participants to share their knowledge and to ask questions when the need arises.
>
> Developing training in-house saves the organization money and extends our capabilities. ISTs contributed to good results in our 2013 Insync Library Client Survey. The accuracy of answers given by staff in response to enquiries was rated as the most important of all survey items with a mean performance score of 6.22 out of a maximum of 7.
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> **Tarita Dickson,** IST Co-ordinator, Carlton Library

While induction and job-specific training is essential, CPD options should be wider than that indicated by job descriptions. Many workers now perform several project and other roles in addition to their core job and often employee value is judged on their skills and know-how rather than on how well they perform their respective jobs (de Jonge, 2013). While it is unrealistic to sanction every request of a PD enthusiast, managers may need to re-evaluate their approach if they are only in the habit of approving requests which have immediate application to a person's job. The organization must also consider the scope of its own PD needs and efforts in the light of societal, legislative and institutional changes and priorities. The increased level of collaborative work raises needs for increased PD in areas such as teamwork, negotiation, influencing skills, and working with diversity. An example of work to strengthen innovative capacity is given below in Case 3.

Case 3: Innovation skills development

> To support organizational learning in the area of innovation, in 2012 RMIT University Library developed an Innovation Process Model after gaining insights from available models (Ginzburg, et al., 2007; Tidd & Bessant, 2009). The model that we created shows how to take an initial idea through development, decision, implementation and review and is supported by simple descriptions of selected techniques for problem definition, idea generation and decision making.
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> An accompanying submission form guides staff to include the information decision-makers need to respond quickly to suggestions. The model and associated resources can be used by individual staff to learn about innovation and project management processes, and to increase the likelihood of their suggestions being welcomed and approved. A template is provided to decision-makers to prompt them to provide adequate and constructive feedback on suggestions. To support uptake and ongoing understanding of this area, popular interactive workshops were held to trial several problem definition tools with future workshops planned to focus on other steps of the innovation process. Where an organization does not have the resources to develop their own model they can easily adopt an existing one, however there may be value in adapting the language or complexity to meet the local situation.
>
> **Julia Leong**, Staff Development Librarian (Leong & Anderson, 2012)

Are we able to apply what we learn?

Application of learning is essential for individual and organizational benefit. Major considerations include whether: teachers and facilitators use strategies which enhance transfer of learning to the workplace; learners have the skills to take in and apply content; managers ensure application opportunities exist; and learners are proactive in applying new skills.

Teaching strategies which enhance transfer

It is very difficult to cover this topic in detail in this article, but it is important that teaching strategies be well matched to the learning task and be designed to engage and motivate learners. Responsibility for transfer success is not solely the responsibility of the learner. Research by Stewart et al. (2011) compared the impact of two pedagogical approaches for leadership training, finding social interaction using computer simulations delivered improved levels of sharing knowledge and quality of decisions in a stable environment as compared with an information transmission approach. The case studies included in this article provide evidence of value of active and socially interactive learning in a face to face context. Learning by teaching others is also an effective strategy (Ross, 2013); although, it is important that these teachers are trained in effective learning design, delivery and assessment.

> If library employees share their knowledge with others through a presentation or training session, they are more likely to retain their learning while at the same time spreading their knowledge to others (Blakiston, 2011, p. 735).

Learning strategies which enhance transfer

Sylvia Downs (Downs& Perry, 1982; Pearn& Downs, 1989) and her colleagues identified that skilled learners use a greater variety of approaches to learning than less effective learners. Pearn and Downs(1989) list ten characteristics of skilled learners, the first being that they "take responsibility for their learning and generally adopt an active role" (p.10). Learning is enhanced by selecting appropriate ways of learning for different types of material. For example, it is unhelpful to use memorization to grasp concepts that demand a detailed understanding. Other characteristics of skilled learners include asking more and particular kinds of questions, seeking feedback on performance, and confidence; however, the reader is advised to consult the source article by Pearn and Downs (1989) to gain a more thorough insight into this research based work.

Individuals or small groups attending a conference or training course gain little if there is no time and support to reflect on what is learnt and to prepare an action plan for the transfer of acquired knowledge to their workplace. Belling et al. (2004) affirm the necessity of learning transfer (p. 234). Although they cite several hindrances to transfer of learning, they also note important support factors identified by Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992, pp. 420-1) and Holton et al. (1997, p. 110). These are: job aids and rewards (Tannenbaum&Yukl, 1992) or Holton et al.'s concept of positive personal outcomes such as career development and advancement; support, especially from supervisors and peers; and the opportunity to apply learning.

In investigating return on investment (ROI) through application of learning from formal management education programs, Longenecker et al. (1998) found three effective learning strategies which are:

1. being an action oriented learner.
2. accountability for application.
3. ongoing review of material and key concepts.

Participants in the research study recommended specific actions to increase ROI.

These were: having a learning implementation plan; reviewing material "immediately after the program"; active participation in the learning experience; reporting back to supervisors and peers; reviewing "material and development plans with a superior/mentor for accountability and feedback"; including PD goals in performance plans and reviews; teaching what is learnt to others; finding opportunities to use skills which one is developing; engaging with a buddy; and visual aids to refresh learning (Longenecker et al., 1998, p. 157).

Case 4: Peer partnerships

> Paired learning can be an effective way of directly linking learning with professional practice. In 2013, I participated in the RMIT University Peer Partnership program. This voluntary, sustainable professional development model, which was introduced to the University in 2012, is designed with an action learning methodology to enhance teaching practice and involves a minimum of 8 hours commitment. Commencing with facilitated group training, matched partners then identify a focus for observation, set aside time for observation of each other's conduct of classes or preparation of material, and then provide written and oral feedback. Improvement strategies can be part of the ensuing discussion. This is followed by individual reflection, goal setting, implementation, and evaluation of the set goals. Participating in this program challenged me to prepare material more carefully, listen and respond to critical feedback and reflect on and apply suggested alternatives to improve practice. This method of applying learning was personally beneficial and the formation of the peer relationship has been mutually agreed to be continued informally.
>
> **Robyn Phillips**, Liaison Librarian

Conclusion

Individuals' motivation and learning skill levels have significant impact on continuing professional development (CPD) effectiveness, as does the learning climate in their organizations. Professionals and employing agencies jointly bear responsibility for CPD outcomes and must take positive steps to establish effective practice.LIS professionals should be cognizant of what motivates them to engage in CPD and organizations must facilitate supportive learning environments. Both staff and employers are responsible for sourcing learning opportunities and utilizing effective learning transfer strategies. An intentional approach to CPD will result in increased benefits to LIS professionals and organizations. Examples of good practice, including those provided in the case studies in this article, can be applied when considering personal CPD options and organizational programs.

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