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## **The Times They Are A-Changin': Library Administration in the Digital Age**

“No institution can possibly survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organized in such a way as to be able to get along under a leadership composed of average human beings.”

- Peter Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation*

### **1. Introduction**

Libraries have long filled a valuable, and prominent, role in the maintenance of an informed society. The 2007 independent film; *The Hollywood Librarian: A Look at Librarians Through Film* boasts that America’s libraries have “more cardholders that Visa” and more outlets that “McDonalds.”<sup>1</sup> Because of this, and because of their responsibility with responding to a variety of information and technology needs, librarians are often tasked with a variety of duties.

Mary Ellen Bates, a leading business researcher, argues that librarians must have many skills, among which are being comfortable “wearing a number of hats” while simultaneously cultivating “people skills” with both users and other team members in the increasingly complex information organizations of the twenty-first century.<sup>2</sup> One of the many hats that librarians are called upon to fill is that of manager. While librarians are trained information managers, they are rarely trained to manage people or resource. Yet, this is exactly what many librarians are regularly required to do.

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<sup>1</sup> For more about the film and to view a short clip see Anne M. Seidle, “The Hollywood Librarian: A Look at Librarians Through Film,” Videos and Pictures, <http://www.hollywoodlibrarian.com/about.html> (accessed May 6, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Mary Ellen Bates, “The Newly Minted MLS: What Do We Need To Know Today?” *Searcher* 6, no. 5 (May 1998): 31-32.

Libraries are unique among organizations that manage information. Unlike companies such as Google, Microsoft, EBSCO Industries or Yahoo! libraries are not tasked with profitability constraints and also do not have to answer to shareholders. This is not to say they are unaccountable. Unlike for profit information organizations, libraries are often completely dependent upon external sources (and resources) for funding. Libraries do not rent out information items nor do most charge for any of their services, instead, they are uniquely vulnerable to the whims (legitimate or otherwise) of county administrations, university budget committees and other local administrative bodies. Libraries are also distinct in one other aspect: demographic responsibility. Unlike commercial information organizations, libraries are charged with meeting the needs of all the members of their community. While companies like EBSCO or Google are certainly desirous that everyone use their product, they need not be concerned that everyone actually does so. Here is where libraries are most different. They are actively charged with serving every member of their community, be it a campus, county or school district and while not every member of the community may choose to avail themselves of the library's services, the library must maintain itself as if that were the case.

Hence, libraries are run with a "not for profit" model and are charged with providing service to a much wider demographic than commercial organizations. This means that library managers must be frugal, but not profit focused and yet totally comprehensive in their scope of service. These are significant factors in understanding how libraries are managed. In addition to these factors, rarely are library directors trained managers. By trained, I do not mean to imply that they are unskilled or unprofessional, but rather that librarians in management/administration rarely have formal (MBA, etc.)

training in those particular competencies. This too is an important factor in understanding library management. Given that libraries are indeed different than other information organizations, their unique roles shape how their administrators envision and implement management styles and goals.

The focus of this paper will be on understanding past and contemporary methods and trends in management and administration among libraries. This will be accomplished through an overview of library administration and management literature, which will also provide a better understanding of how theories about library management may have shifted over the last twenty years. The paper will not concern itself with the minutia of theories found across the literature, but rather will strive to provide a comprehensive synopsis of the structures and *mentalités* of library administrators and managers. Finally, the paper will offer recommendations based on the competing values framework that library administrators should, or could, make to improve their effectiveness across the field. It is now to those structures and attitudes of the recent past that we turn.

## **2. Library Administration in the Late Twentieth Century**

In 1985, Anne F. Roberts a librarian at the SUNY Albany Libraries argued that the librarian of the twentieth century has become a specialist. This increase in specialization, according to Roberts, encouraged the growth of more bureaucratic structures and management forms in libraries and information organizations.<sup>3</sup> Roberts was entirely correct. One of the largest factors shaping the landscape of library administration in the late twentieth century was an increase in specialization among library personnel. Roberts was not the only librarian who insisted the specialization was

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this see Anne F. Roberts, "The Academic Librarian as Leader or Manager," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 11, no. 1 (March 1985):15-16.

on the rise. In 1986, the Dean of the School of Library Science at UNC, Chapel Hill, Evelyn Daniel, insisted that a different kind of education is needed by the librarian of the late twentieth century. He lamented the lack of technological training and pled for schools to disavow traditional “indoctrination” of students and move toward more specialized, decision-oriented programs, suitable for “adult learning.”<sup>4</sup>

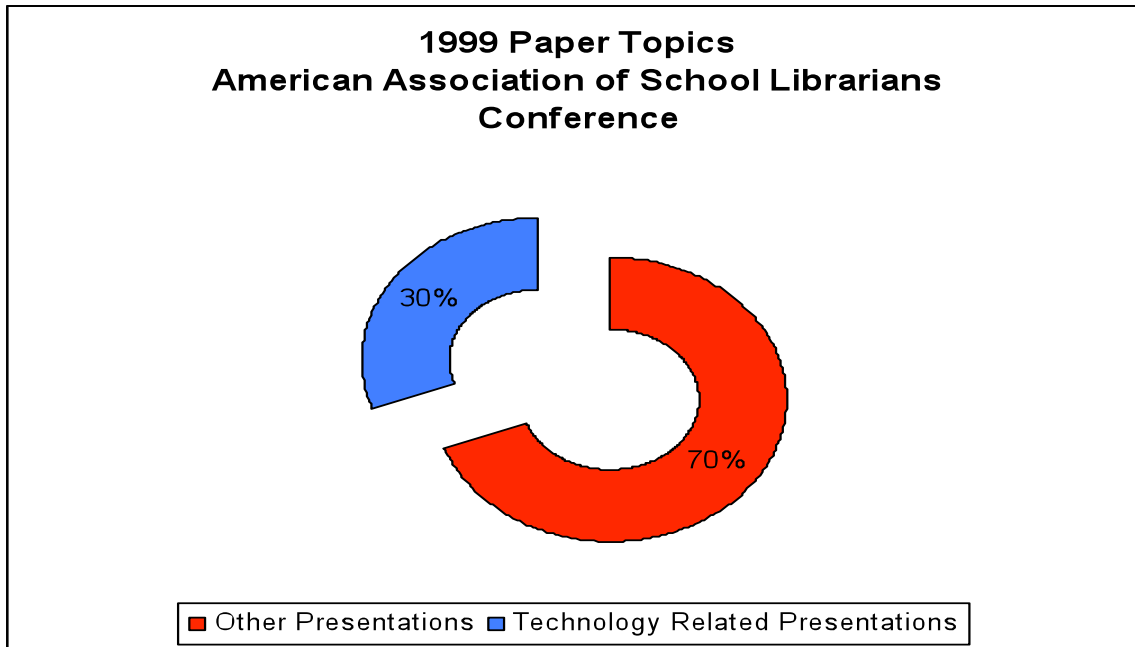


Fig. 1. Data from Anne Clyde . “InfoTech at IASL/AASL 1999 Part 1: Library Automation Systems.” *Teacher Librarian* 27, no. 4 (April 2000): 57.

The increased desire for librarians with specialized abilities was conjoined with the increase in library automation. Daniel could not have been more prescient in his desire to see more technological skills being taught in Library Schools. By 1999, Marlin Moore, the district coordinating librarian for more than 200 elementary, middle and high schools in the Los Angeles insisted that the number one way to effectively manage

<sup>4</sup> Evelyn H. Daniel, “Educating the Academic Librarian for a New Role as Information Resources Manager,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 11, no. 6 (January 1986): 363.

resources was to use a library automation system.<sup>5</sup> In that same year, delegates from some 40 countries met in Birmingham, Alabama for the joint conference of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). Almost a third of the total presentations centered on technology.<sup>6</sup>

Technology became an important part of library administration in the late twentieth century both because of overall advances in computing and because it was seen as a way to further collaborate and proactively deal with the consequences of a variety of uncontrollable politico-financial and technological limitations that libraries were saddled with. In 1997, Brian G. Hobrock argued that the technology is not the reason that libraries exist, but rather is a tool to enable them to achieve “digital convergence.” Through this process of “reengineering” (a concept borrowed from the world of business management) Hobrock sought to offer libraries a means by which their administrative teams could creatively manage both the growth in technological development as well as deal with stagnation in funding and wages.<sup>7</sup>

Part of the financial limitations that hindered libraries were low wages. Wages and their failure to keep pace with other economic shifts were a significant aspect of library management in the 1980’s and 1990’s.<sup>8</sup> The management literature from this period is full of concerns about declining or stagnant salaries. In the late 1990’s New York City public libraries saw around a third of their new librarians leave for financially greener

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Ann Lance, “Effective Library Management,” *Media & Methods* 36, no. 2(Nov/Dec 99): 64.

<sup>6</sup> See Figure 1 for more.

<sup>7</sup> Hobrock, Brice G., “A Manager’s Viewpoint: Opportunities for Radical Paradigm Shifts,” *Journal of Library Administration*. 23 no. 1 (January 1997):182.

<sup>8</sup> For examples of this see Figures 2 and 3.

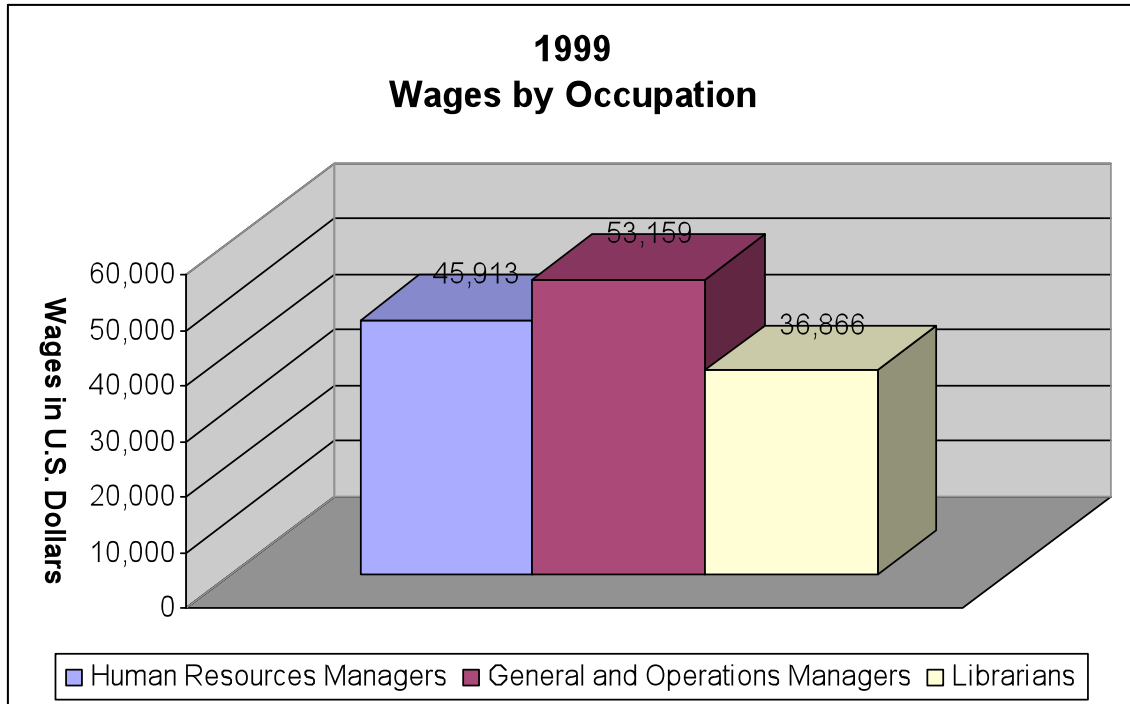


Fig. 2. Data from “Earnings By Occupation and Education.” Census Bureau Home Page. Available from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/earnings/call2usboth.html>.

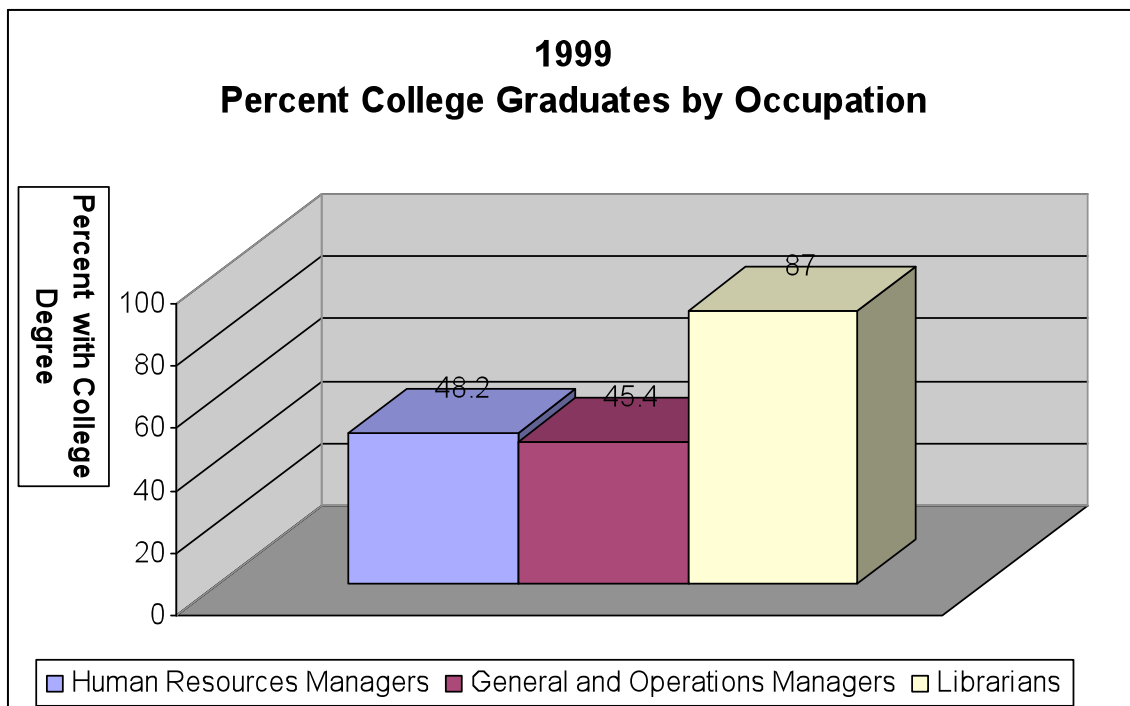


Fig. 3. Data from “Earnings By Occupation and Education.” Census Bureau Home Page. Available from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/earnings/call2usboth.html>.

pastures. Many of the librarians were defecting to corporations or school systems but some were leaving librarianship all together. Brooklyn Public offered such un-competitive wages that it saw nearly forty percent of its staff leave the system before the start of their third year.<sup>9</sup> While not all wage issues were as drastic as those experienced by the New York Public Library system, low wages did prove to be a constant bane of library administrators throughout the 1990's.

Librarians are professionals and as such, are often tasked with working without direct supervision. Actually, lots of librarians in the late twentieth century were “solo librarians” meaning they had “no professional peers” inside their institutions. In 1999 the Special Libraries Association estimated that anywhere from a third to a half of its fourteen thousand plus members worked in solo positions. This of course does not mean

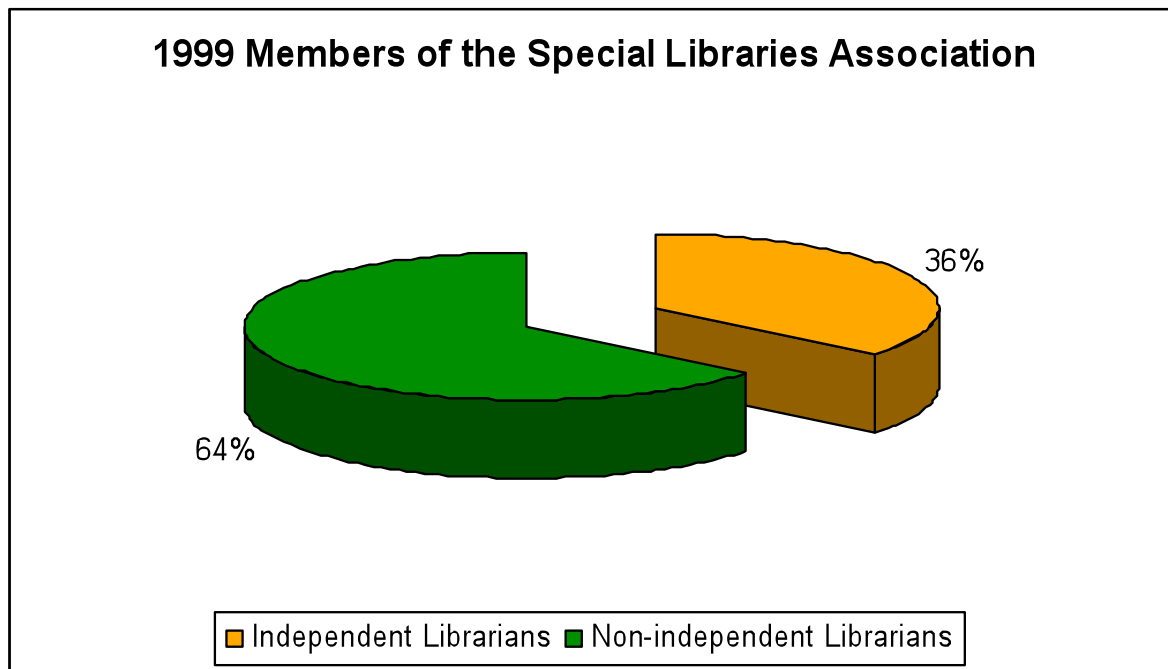


Fig. 4. Data from Judith A. Siess, “Flying Solo: Librarian, Manage Thyself. (Cover story).” *American Libraries* 30, no. 2 (February 1999): 31.

<sup>9</sup> Rick Margolis and Amanda Ferguson, “Seeking Greener Pastures.” *School Library Journal* 45, no. 2 (February 1999): 18.

that those librarians functioned without supervision, but rather that they worked for nonlibrarians. In addition to this, eighty percent of public libraries serving populations less than twenty-five thousand were staffed by only one professional.<sup>10</sup> These are significant numbers. They reveal that a meaningful portions of America's librarians spent the late twentieth century either managing themselves or functioning as de facto administrators.

The 1990's were also a time full of transition for libraries and their managers. The growth in specialization among librarians combined with increasing automation and technological advances provided exciting opportunities for growth, opportunities that were often stunted by limited funding and stagnant wages. These challenges have continued into the twenty-first century but increasingly technology, outsourcing, diversity, combined services and performance have come to dominate the discourse of contemporary library management. It is certainly no accident that the last issues of 1999 for the *Journal of Library Administration* dealt almost exclusively with diversity management, global trends in libraries, consortia and digital libraries. These issues have come to dominate the library management mentalities of the 2000's. It is now to the twenty-first century that we turn.

### **3. Library Administration in the Early Twenty-first Century**

Recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce has increasingly come to be seen as crucial to contemporary libraries. However, gender imbalances and ethnic inequalities still remain (see Figs. 6 and 7). While there are explanations for these statistics, library

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<sup>10</sup> Judith A. Siess, "Flying Solo: Librarian, Manage Thyself. (Cover story)." *American Libraries* 30, no. 2 (February 1999): 31.

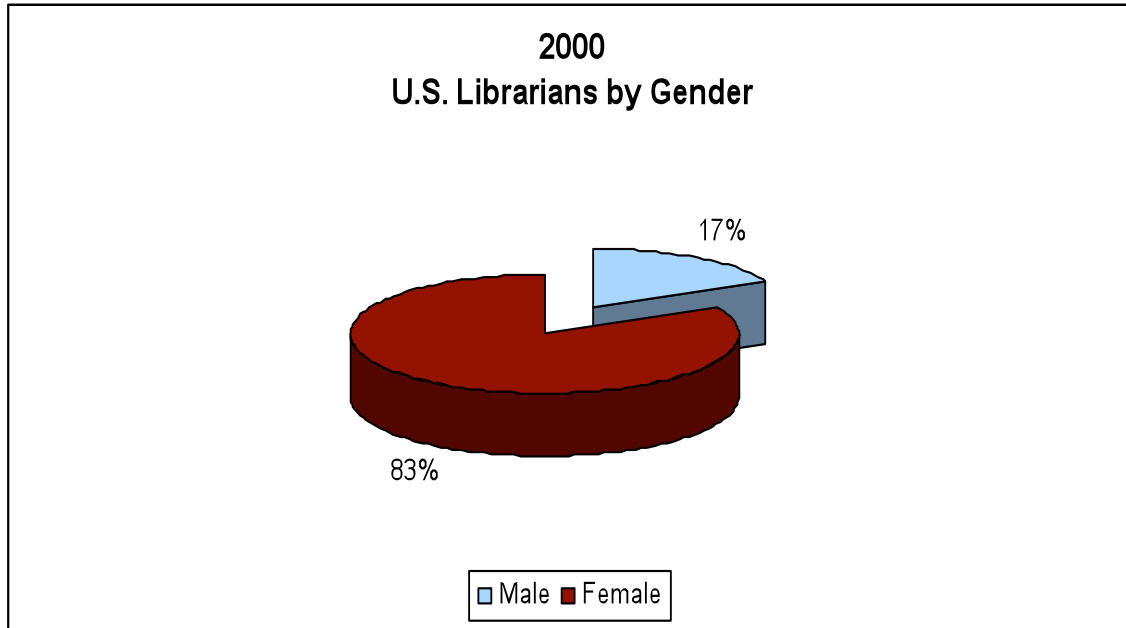


Fig. 5. Date from United States Census Bureau. Available at <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/broker>

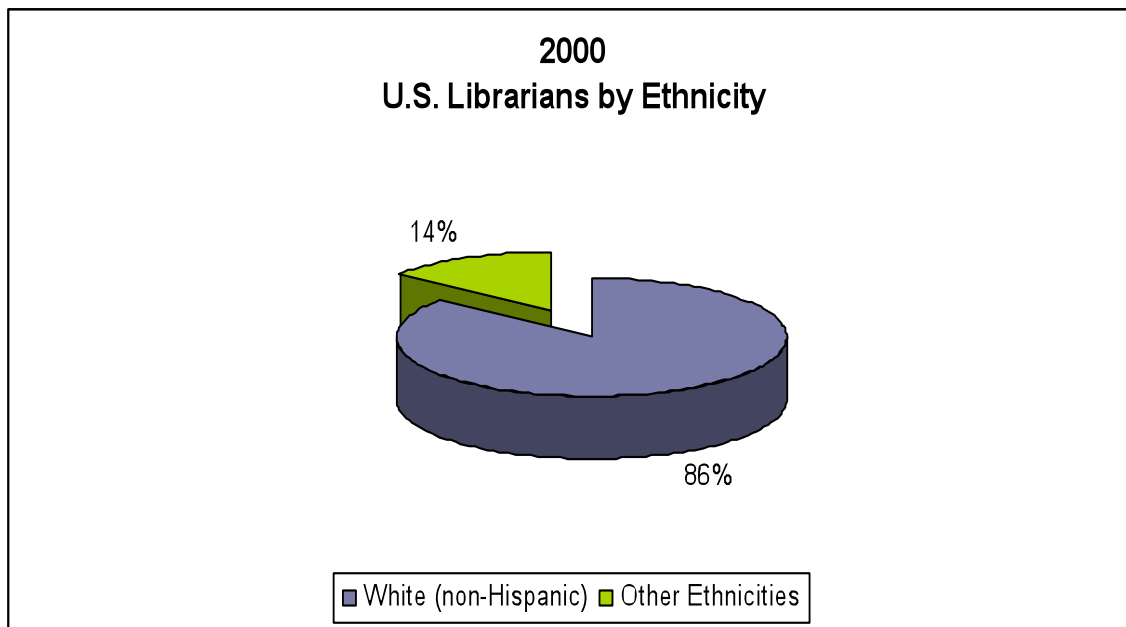


Fig. 6. Date from United States Census Bureau. Available at <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/broker>

managers can expect to continue to be called upon to invest in diversifying their workforce.<sup>11</sup>

Outsourcing has become a leading model in library management. This is especially true concerning reference and technical services. The wholesale outsourcing of cataloging was without precedent until the fall of 1993 when Wright State University outsourced the entire cataloging department of their library.<sup>12</sup> While few libraries have taken steps so drastic the practice is becoming increasingly ubiquitous. The frequency of outsourcing was addressed by Norman Oder in a 2004 editorial from the *Library Journal*. Oder claimed that, “outsourcing cataloging, processing, and . . . other professional tasks” have become “routine.”<sup>13</sup> Technical services are not the only parts of the library to face the prospect of outsourcing. Virtual reference services are being presented to libraries as a panacea for the ills of declining visits to the reference desk.<sup>14</sup> Outsourcing, however, is not the only re-imagining being done by library administrators.

Many library directors are rethinking the consortia model. Library consortia are actually fairly old; dating back to the 1960s and the burgeoning of automation. However, as early as 2001 new types of consortium were being developed: “superconsortium.” These entities are composed of a number of smaller consortia and allow the purchase of goods and services that would normally be prohibitively expensive.<sup>15</sup> These expensive goods and services are more often than not technological in nature. The twenty-first

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<sup>11</sup> For more about library ethnic diversity see Keith Curry Lance, “Racial and Ethnic Diversity of U.S. Library Workers,” *American Libraries* 36, no. 5 (May 2005): 41-43.

<sup>12</sup> Clare B. Dunkle, “Outsourcing the catalog department: A meditation inspired by the business and library literature,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 22, no. 1 (1996): 33.

<sup>13</sup> Norman Oden, “When LSSI Comes: Public Libraries, Private Company: the Outsourcing Compromise,” *Library Journal* (October 1, 2004): 36.

<sup>14</sup> For more on this trend see Michael E. Casey and Laura C Savastinuk, “Library 2.0: Service for the Next-Generation Library,” *Library Journal* 131, no. 14 (Sep 2006): 40.

<sup>15</sup> Sharon L. Bostick and Robert E. Dugan, “The History and Development of Academic Library Consortia in the United States: An Overview,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 27, no. 2 (March 2001): 130.

century has experienced nothing, if not a rise in the use of and reliance upon technology in libraries.

Most recently libraries have begun to examine ways to better serve their users who can not come into the library. Issues one and two of the *Journal of Library Administration*, published earlier this year (2009) both dealt exclusively with topics such as long distance learning, paperless office management, Blackboard®, Online Faculty and Library 2.0.<sup>16</sup> In short, the future of libraries is “out there.” Already library managers are working with employees, as well as reference and technical contractors, who never set foot inside the library.

#### **4. Competencies**

What do these developments mean for librarians in training? What managerial competencies must they hone if they wish to be effective managers in the mid-twenty first century? Library managers are likely to face continued calls for diversity recruitment. This task calls for the director role. To achieve diversity, one must develop and communicate a vision, while setting goals and objectives to make that happen. In a recent article James J. Duderstadt, President *Emeritus*, of the University of Michigan argued that our current, knowledge-driven economy places a “new premium on workforce skills” while allowing “open-source technologies [to] challenge conventional free-market philosophies.”<sup>17</sup> What does this mean for library leaders? It means they must continue to be open to change. Yet, they must not simply be flexible to change, but must act as agents. No longer must library administrators simply embrace new technologies, rather, with tools such open-source collaboration they must actively take part in shaping

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<sup>16</sup> For more on this see *Journal of Library Administration*, 49 nos. 1 & 2 (January 2009).

<sup>17</sup> James J. Duderstadt, “Possible Futures for the Research Library in the 21st Century,” *Journal of Library Administration*, 49, no. 3 (April 2009): abstract.

the future of their libraries and information organizations. Innovator and director roles will be of supreme importance in the accomplishment of this mission. Library administrators will have to be prepared to not only develop a vision and set goals, but to simultaneously think creatively and adapt to social and technological innovations that are beyond their control.

While it would obviously be ideal if all library administrators could perfectly embody every single leadership role in the competing values framework, that is simply impossible. However, it is not impossible to select some of the more crucial competencies that will be most necessary in the library administrator of the twenty-first century. Innovator, Director and Coordinator are likely to be three of the most valued competencies of the future. As libraries increasingly expand their borders beyond the four walls of their building, successful managers will increasingly need to be able to manage across functions, manage projects (of a variety of sorts) and design work for a range of employees (both on and off site). Additionally, managers will need to become increasingly comfortable with change. Libraries are often the locus of technological innovations and while no large scale automation projects are likely to be needed, libraries are nevertheless likely to experience a continual shift toward online resources and virtual librarianship. Lastly, the director role will be more important than ever before. Change without direction is simply chaos and library administrators will not only be called upon to orchestrate change, but to provide vision and actionable goals. This is where Library and Information Science schools and programs can, and should fill a vital role. They must increase the required amount of leadership and or management training that their students

receive. Information management is important, but personnel and resource management is equally significant.

## **5. Conclusion**

As a whole, libraries lack a coherent management strategy for dealing with change. This is likely the result of there being so many types of libraries and informational situations. What this does mean, however, is that individual library managers and administrators will be given greater opportunities for individual action. The ALA by means of the Library Leadership & Management Association does provide some boundaries and direction, but by and large individual library leaders are free to create meaningful change as they wish. In short, future library administrators must be the change they wish to see.

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