

**Aspects of multi-skilling contributing to quality service provision within academic  
libraries**

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of Magister Bibliothecologiae in the Department of Library and Information  
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## DECLARATION

I declare that *Aspects of multi-skilling contributing to quality service provision within academic libraries* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for a degree, examination or assessment in any university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Zulaiga Davids

November 2004

Signed: .....

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special thanks must be extended to my husband, Fareed Davids for his support, understanding and love shown to me throughout my years of part-time study. His continual love and support gave me encouragement to achieve my goal.

To my children Yusha and Jihan, in order to achieve your goals, there are certain sacrifices to be made, that is why quality time with you was so important to me. .

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Lastly, to Peninsula Technikon, for providing me with study leave, tuition fees, and the resources that enabled me to complete my research project.

I embarked on my part-time studies course in 1992, starting with a B.A. degree, then the Postgraduate Diploma in Librarianship, then the B.Bibl. (Hons) and to conclude the M.Bibl. My M.Bibl. is completed in Peninsula Technikon's final year as a Technikon. In 2005 it will become Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

## SUMMARY

The research project focuses on aspects of multi-skilling as utilized in academic libraries internationally which contributes to providing a quality service delivery.


The researcher's extensive literature search, focuses on aspect of multi-skilling programs such as: job rotation, cross-training, job enrichment, on-the-job training, and succession planning conducted at academic libraries in America, Australia, Canada, Birmingham, Nigeria, Kenya, Botswana and South Africa. Multi-skilling can be seen as the umbrella term for the above concepts.

It was found in the literature that aspects of multi-skilling as applied in American academic libraries was a voluntary process and often occurred between the Public service and the Technical service within academic libraries. At Wollongong, Queensland and Birmingham academic libraries the program was formal, and staff had to apply to enrol for the program. This does not mean that staff qualified automatically. This was a formalized policy within the university. In Nigeria, Kenya and Botswana the program, at academic libraries was formal but literature does not indicate if it is a university policy or just the academic library's policy.

The immense benefits derived from all the aspects of multi-skilling are: contributes towards employee training and development; employee satisfaction; reduction in boredom; increased productivity; enhances job skills; increased versatility; career mobility and advancement; increased intellectual stimulation and confidence;

enhances workers' flexibility and broadens their knowledge; achieves efficiency in the workplace; helps break down barriers in efficiency which exists on many levels; better communication between the various units in the library; and better understanding of responsibility involved in other units.

For academic libraries to become effective, the management of service organizations needs to create a climate in which staff will function effectively, be happy and derive maximum satisfaction from their work. Academic libraries exist for the benefit of their users, supporting the teaching and research programs of their parent institutions. To achieve this objective, the academic library manager needs to have effective staff organization strategies devised to ensure best quality service delivery to its users.

These strategies employed are job rotation,  cross training, job enrichment, succession planning and on-the-job training that will ultimately contribute towards provision of a quality service delivery.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Libraries of tertiary institutions are changing faster than their respective parent institutions.

Everything in and around the academic library is changing; services, technologies, organisational construct, ownership and access, policies and values (Riggs, 1997:3).

With the unprecedented rate of change in academic libraries, managers and leaders must create an environment conducive to learning, if academic libraries are going to meet the expectations of their users, namely students, non academic and academic staff. Academic libraries have long been known, for their clearly defined areas of responsibilities, divisions of labour and specific units or departments. The academic library world has witnessed some sign of collapse in the rigid organisational design. Staff members are encouraged to work across boundaries and departments within academic libraries. Within academic libraries departments like public and technical services are being merged into one functional area (Riggs, 1997:5; DeZelar-Tiedman, 1999:30).

Line (1996:34) declared that due to budget cuts and other changes affecting the service, the academic library staff members consider the library understaffed and some staff thinks they are overworked. Staff members are not utilized optimally in the work place. There are many frustrations among the staff, many are bored, some severely de-motivated. Ideas from staff members are rarely welcomed and if any are ventured they are squashed, supervisors forget how

easy it is to discourage or inhibit staff. Staff may be working quite hard, but are rarely intellectually stretched and in many areas substantially underused. Supervisors at all levels tend to seriously misjudge the capacity of their staff and far too much work is done at too high a level. This is a major contributing factor to inefficiency, boredom and low motivation (Line, 1996: 35).

There is little movement of staff within the academic library or between departments. Many staff members have been doing the same job for ten years or more. As a result of this, staff become institutionalized particularly if they are in back office jobs and increasingly unwilling to move. They see the academic library and the outside world through the eyes of their department, and this affects the ability of the staff to respond to change or to look ahead. Staff members become compartmentalized and there is little sense of organisational spirit. This leads to suspicion and misunderstanding between departments, lack of communication, duplication of effort between departments and a lack of coordination all of which results in overall inefficiency and poor service delivery (Line, 1996:35).

Academic libraries, with a service-orientated approach, focus on obtaining books, or information that the user wants regardless of the source. Service means that the user leaves the academic library satisfied regardless of how many books or other materials are in the collection. According to Jain (1999:284) users entering the academic libraries do not care if the service provider holds a Masters or doctorate degree, he or she has an information need that must be satisfied. Qualifications relevant to the profession may be of little interest to the user. What is important is service delivery from the staff. In a service-orientated approach, the staff in academic libraries focuses on obtaining the material for the user (Sweeney, 1994:76).

Service organisations must be active and responsive to their staff and users as well as to changes within the academic libraries. For academic libraries to become effective, the management of service organisations needs to create a climate in which staff will function effectively, be happy and derive maximum satisfaction from their work. Academic libraries exist for the benefit of their users, supporting the teaching and research programs of their parent institutions. To achieve this objective, the academic library manager needs to have effective staff organisation strategies devised to ensure best quality service delivery to its users (Olorunsola, 2000:94).

There are many techniques to assist the organisation in the transfer of knowledge, such as job rotation, job enrichment, , on-the-job training and succession planning which enable the libraries to have a flexible and adaptable staff contributing to quality service delivery (Malinski, 2002:675).



## **2. THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS PAPER ARE:**

- To sensitize academic library managers to the importance of aspects of multi-skilling
- To demonstrate how academic library managers with their limited budget and resources can improve service delivery by employing an appropriate aspect of multi-skilling for their staff
- To highlight the benefits and limitations of multi-skilling to the individual, department and to the academic library
- To indicate how multi-skilling can address the continual changes within an academic institution

## **2.1. SCOPE OF THE PROJECT**

The scope of the research project is based on an extensive review of the literature on multi-skilling in the forms of job rotation, cross training, job enrichment, on-the-job training, and succession planning as utilized in academic libraries. The approaches to the aspects of multi-skilling will focus on America, Australia, Britain, Africa and South African academic libraries. The study is not a comparative one but aims to establish the different approaches to aspects of multi-skilling in academic libraries and its benefits contributing towards individual development and to better service delivery.



### **3. MULTI-SKILLING DEFINED**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The ambit of multi-skilling is very broad. In order to understand this concept this section will explore the various concepts that are related to aspects of multi-skilling. When applied in an organisation multi-skilling provides workers with the opportunity to develop different skills, knowledge, competencies and experiences; which will contribute towards development of the individual and towards better service delivery in the organisation. Multi-skilling is the umbrella term which include job rotation, job enrichment, cross training, on-the-job training and succession planning.



In the literature a variety of terms are used to describe what the researcher terms, aspects of multi-skilling, these terms include: job rotation, job enrichment, cross-training, on-the-job training, and succession planning. Cross training has been used as synonymous with job rotation (Grobler et al, 2003:323). In the literature the term cross training, is used instead of job rotation, this is referred to in the American academic libraries. These are the more popular terms that will be discussed.


#### **3.2. Definitions of Multi-skilling**

“Multiskilling is the practice of training employees to do a number of different tasks”

(Collins English Dictionary, 1999:1022).

“Multiskilling is the acquisition of additional task related skills and knowledge to enable an individual to perform a wider range of task and function. The opportunity to acquire a range of skills is primarily within the one classification level, although multi-skilling allows employees to perform effectively across traditional job and task boundaries” (University of Wollongong, 2004:1).

Multi-skilling is “an employee, who can do more than one job. An employee who is trained in one job but because of other input he or she can be used at different areas of the organisation. Multi-skilling refers to wide usability and adaptability of the worker in the workplace” (van der Wal and van der Wal, 2001:206).

The researcher’s interpretation of the  concept of multi-skilling is the acquisition of skills, knowledge, competency, and experiences which in the process develops the individual, enables the individual to perform tasks outside the immediate job requirements, provides the organisation with a flexible and adaptable worker, and creates a skilled pool of human resources.

### **3.2.1. Job rotation defined**

“Job rotation refers to the planned movement of people between jobs over a period and for one or more of a number of different purposes” (Bennett, 2003:7).

“Job rotation is a popular administrative control. This strategy involves moving employees from workstation to workstation at specific intervals” (Triggs and King, 2000:32).

Job rotation makes people in different functional areas more connected; it also provides knowledge of the other part of the organisation. The greater the job rotation the more consensus it creates between individuals, and the coordination between departments. The literature also supports the view that job rotation improves commitment and reduces psychological barriers (Weerd-Nederhof et al, 2002:326).

Increasing task variety should increase employee satisfaction, reduce errors due to fatigue, improves production, efficiency and reduces on the job injuries. Many companies have great success in using job rotation. It is criticized by some critics including Grobler et al, (2003:112) and Nel (2001:414) that job rotation often involves nothing more than having people perform several boring and monotonous jobs rather than one dull and tedious job. The researcher’s literature search diverge with the above authors’ view in that aspects of multi-skilling such as job rotation, cross training, job enrichment were well implemented and successful at academic libraries.

#### **3.2.1.1. Forms of job rotation**

The forms of job rotation include: within function, cross-functional, lateral and levels of job rotation. The researcher will elaborate on the forms and how it is applied in the workplace.

#### **3.2.1.1.1. Within function rotation**

Within function rotation, means rotating between jobs with the same or similar level of responsibility and within the same operational functional area. An example of within function would be when an individual member of a permanent work team moves between some or all the jobs covered by the team over a period in order to maintain or improve motivation and to ensure optimum staffing (Bennett, 2003:7). For example, in the cataloguing department, the cataloguer will move between classification and acquisitions over a period of time.

#### **3.2.1.1.2. Cross-functional rotation**

Cross-functional rotation is the movement between jobs in different parts of the organisation over a period or time. The job identified for cross-functional rotation is likely to be arranged in a sequence representing increasing levels of responsibility. The individual rotates between a numbers of jobs in different departments. This is to broaden the individuals' experience, and gradually increasing the level of responsibility (Bennett, 2003:8). For example, the circulation librarian might rotate in the reference and subject librarian's departments to broaden his or her experience in the library service.

#### **3.2.1.1.3. Lateral Rotation**

Lateral rotation involves a move to a different work environment so that the managers may develop competencies in general management, organisational knowledge, decision making skills and be exposed to many organisational and management styles (Grobler et al, 2003:324). The head of department of the technical services might work in the periodicals and circulation department to become acquainted with the functions.



#### **3.2.1.1.4. Levels of Job Rotation**

At lower levels, job rotation normally consumes a shorter period, such as a few hours or one or two days. At a higher level, job rotation may last for a longer period, because staff training may involve learning complex functions and the assumption of more responsibility, assignments that may range from several months to one or two years in various departments. Job rotation for management trainees usually involves several short-term assignments that teach a variety of skills and give the trainee a greater understanding of how various areas function. For middle management and upper level management, job rotation may last for one or two years. This is true for senior management who must obtain an overall perspective of the organisation and who must spend more of their time managing the total organisation and less time managing on the micro level (Grobler et al, 2003:324).



#### **3.2.2. Benefits of job rotation**

According to the literature job rotation has many benefits for the individual, department and institution (Cheraskin and Campion, 1996:33; Triggs and King, 2000:32). Benefits of job rotation are perceived as follows:

- Develops multi-skilled employees
- Contributes towards employee training and development
- Gives the right skills and experience for today's competitive edge
- Employee satisfaction
- Reduction in boredom
- Increased productivity

Job rotation leads directly to the accelerated development of new members of staff.

Cross-functional job rotation can be a powerful way of developing organisational high flyers.

Enabling staff to work in different areas of the organisation through the cross-functional job rotation can contribute to knowledge retention and management by spreading individual expertise more widely within the organisation (Bennett, 2003:8). The advantage of job rotation is that people are prepared to assume greater responsibility in the higher levels (Swanepoel, 2003: 469).

In addition to providing a well-rounded training experience for each person, it helps avoid stagnation through the constant introduction of new points of view in each department.

It also tests the trainees and helps to identify the person's strong and weak points. Periodic job changing can also improve interdepartmental cooperation managers become more understanding of each other's problems, while rotation also widens the trainees' acquaintances among management (Dessler, 1994:267).

For the organisation, the contribution of job rotation is the development of the individual, skilled staff to rotate between departments and a skilled pool of trained staff (Bennett, 2003:8).

With job rotation, an inexperienced manager will gain insight and broad understanding of the organisation and allow a specialist to turn into a generalist. Job rotation is a method to broaden individual exposure to company operations, reducing boredom and stimulating new ideas (Grobler et al, 2003:324).

### **3.2.3. Limitations of Job rotation**

A major disadvantage of job rotation however, is that it can de-motivate intelligent and aggressive employees who seek specific responsibility and can eventually produce a number of employees with limited job knowledge (Swanepoel, 2003, 469). Cross-functional rotation makes demands on the support of the colleagues of participants. This can cause resentment where their support is provided for those they perceive to be members of a privileged group (Bennett, 2003:8). It encourages “generalization” and tends to be more appropriate for developing general line managers than functional staff experts (Grobler et al, 2003:112).

### **3.3. Definition of cross training**



Cross training is synonymous with job rotation therefore, the researcher will accept the job rotation explanation as outlined in the above section.

“Cross training is the process of teaching an individual new job skill in a position other than his or her usual one” (Johnson, 1996:644).

“Cross training is the process of teaching employees how to do each others’ jobs” (Kaeter, 1993:36).

### **3.4. Definition of job enrichment**

“The term enrichment refers to a number of different processes of rotating, enlarging, and aggregating tasks.” An earlier example of this process was the use of job rotation. This

involves the periodic shifting of a worker from one work simplified task to another (Bratton and Gold, 1999:107).

“Job enrichment is the horizontal expansion of tasks. This approach takes some of the authority from the supervisors and adds it to the jobs. Job enrichment increases the vertical scope and gives the worker additional responsibility, including planning and quality control” (Martell and Untawale, 1983:339).

### **3.4.1. Job enrichment model**

Burnout is a reality in all job situations, and staff experience high level of stress and anxiety at their work. Technology systems, social, political, and economic changes have an impact on working relationships. They change the way in which staff look at themselves, their work and one another. Librarians talk about boredom, the work does not have the same meaning and interest, and there is a lack of challenge. Changes such as new computer systems will bring on new tasks but not new roles for the individual. Librarians feel that the quality of work life is unsatisfactory, that in spite of participation they are not usually involved in decision-making processes. How can they deal with the feeling of anxiety, dissatisfaction and lack of commitment? (Martell and Untawale, 1983:339).

Bratton and Gold (1999:107) cite the model of Hackman and Oldman which suggest five core characteristics which result in the workers experiencing three favourable psychological states and these in turn lead to a positive outcome in the workplace. The five characteristics are: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback.

The five characteristics result in the workers experiencing three favourable psychological states. In the first three psychological states, the worker experiences a sense of meaningfulness, responsibility and knowledge results. The first state has to do with the degree to which the employee experiences the work as worthwhile, important and valuable. The second state is the extent to which the employee feels responsible and accountable for the outcome. The third psychological state refers to the extent to which the employee knows and understands how well he or she is performing the job on a regular basis. In accordance with this model, the employee's experiences of the three states will lead to internal motivation, satisfaction, high quality of work, and low absenteeism, provided there exist is a basic level of satisfaction within the work environment (Swanepoel, 2003:199).



Like the Hackman and Oldman model, the proponents of quality of work life (QWL) are able to demonstrate that work satisfaction can meet the psychological needs of the employee for example feeling of self-esteem, competency and self-actualization, while simultaneously encouraging improvement in productivity norms (Martell and Untawale, 1983:340).

### **3.4.2. Quality of Work Life**

Quality of work life (QWL) is “the degree to which members of work organisation are able to satisfy important personal needs through their expectations in the organisation” (Martel and Untawale, 1983:339). Job enrichment has similar characteristics as QWL, which is expressed through the process of the three psychological states mentioned earlier in this paper.

According to Martel and Untawale (1983:339) the characteristics included in the quality of work life are:

- Participation in decision making - involvement in the decisions that affect the task, your job, and your role in the library
- Freedom and independence – this can include scheduling, namely when do you do what during the day
- Challenge – how you deal with the challenges of the day
- Utilizing skills and abilities – how you apply your skills and ability in the work environment
- Expression of creativity - who does your work helps and how important does it seem to you
- Opportunities for learning – this can include feedback, namely the information that you received and how your efforts contribute to the goals of your unit, the library and most important, to the users



### **3.5 On-the-job training**

Dessler (1994:244); Grobler et al (2003:323) and Nel (2001:489) refer to on-the-job training as having an individual performing the actual job while still on a learning curve. Everyone that joins an institution receives some form of on-the-job training. All three authors assert that it is either a supervisor or a more experienced co-worker that will guide the new employee on how to perform the task. This method facilitates learning, since the trainee learns by actually doing the work and getting prompt feedback (Dessler, 1994: 244). Nel (2001: 489) declares that this method usually fits the needs of a particular employee and suits his or her background, knowledge and skills.

### **3.5.1. Benefits of on-the-job training**

Grobler et al (2003:323) state that the benefits of on-the-job training are:

- The employee is doing the actual work, not simulated tasks
- The experienced supervisor instructs the employee on the proper execution of the task
- The trainee works under normal working conditions and requires no special training facility
- It builds a cooperative relationship between the supervisor and the trainee

### **3.5.2. Limitations of on-the-job training**

Grobler et al (2003:323) state that the limitations of on-the-job training are:

- The trainer may not be motivated to do the training
- The trainer may execute the work well, but lacks the technique on how to train people



### **3.6. Succession Planning**

According to Desslar (1994:266) “succession planning refers to a process of (1) personal planning and forecasting and (2) management needs analysis and development through which senior level openings are planned for and eventually filled.” Grobler et al (2003: 316) state that in order to attract, keep, and motivate staff is through a systematic program of career development. In this way the institution does not lose its valuable employees. Training enables an employee to acquire skills needed for promotion and it eases the shift from the employee’s present job to one involving greater responsibility. Succession planning involves identifying projected vacancies, estimating the promotability of each candidate and, most importantly,

identifying development needs to ensure the availability of qualified personnel for further openings (Grobler et al, 1994:316).

#### **4. Aspects of multi-skilling as utilized in academic libraries in American universities.**

In addressing this aspect of the paper the researcher embarks on exploring the literature on the various techniques utilized in the American libraries on the aspects of multi-skilling and its benefits to the users and how this ultimately contributes to service delivery. During the literature search six academic libraries were selected which focused on aspects of multi-skilling such as job rotation, cross training, job enrichment, and how these concepts were applied in the academic library, the benefits derived for the individual and the library, and its contribution to service delivery. The researcher will explore job rotation and cross training and look at the aim, planning of the program, implementation evaluation and the benefits attained.



Froelick et al (2003:1) observed during the data gathering process that in order for the cross training program to be successful, staff should be motivated and therefore accept aspects of the multi-skilling program. Job rotation and or cross training at academic libraries are seen as a voluntary process, initiated by staff. It occurs when there is an opening in the academic library and two staff members from two different departments want to rotate. The supervisor and the training manager of the library need to be approached for their permission. In a structured program, volunteers will be asked but if there are no volunteers then the department head and the training managers will volunteer staff members (Cheraskin and Campion, 1996: 37; Gossen et al, 1990:19; and Johnson, 1996:645).



Staff members are best trained by their peers and not by managers or outside people. This training contributes towards common goals and high quality of service to users (Kaeter, 1993: 37; Cheraskin and Campion, 1996:31; Gossen et al, 1990:19 and Johnson, 1996:645).

#### **4.1. Suny/Albany University in the United States on cross training**

(Gossen et al, 1990:19; Davenport, 1991:52 and Johnson, 1996:645) argue for a flexible approach towards training of staff members. Staff who would be interested in cross-training program needs only to get management approval.

At Suny/Albany University in the United States four librarians decided upon cross training program. The objective of the program was to improve communication between librarians working in different departments, to facilitate cooperation, to get greater understanding of the relationships between the functions and in providing the best possible service for the users (Gossen et al, 1990:18). Four librarians of which two were bibliographers and two were cataloguers participated in this cross training program. The planning process of the program took three months, the participants developed their own structure and the focus of the program. The functions and concepts were listed as well as the time calculated to do the training (Gossen et al, 1990:20). During the evaluation of the program, the professional benefits described, were both of technical and environmental in nature. Technical benefits reinforced the participants' skills or knowledge and resulted in greater self-sufficiency. Environmental benefits stress the importance of cooperation between the professionals within the organisation, and an increase of interaction between the paraprofessionals in other departments. Findings indicated

that cross training experience could relieve the increased sense of isolation and have an increased sense that they are working towards the common goal of providing high quality service to the users. Even in this bureaucratic structure the program was still a success (Gossen et al, 1990:20-21)

Davenport (1991:52) in his cross training for reference librarians and cataloguers, stated that their aim was the improvement in communication and coordination. The reason for emphasis of the above point was that their organisational structure was flat and this required intensive coordination from the various coordinators of the different functions. In this flat organisational structure staff had more opportunity for cross-training and this was applied on vertical levels and also laterally. The implication was a flexible approach with users receiving high quality service and also having access to librarians.



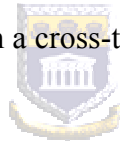
#### **4.2. St. Paul library, University of Minnesota on cross training program**

Johnson (1996:645) identified a cross training program at the University of Minnesota St. Paul Campus Library. The aim was to increase the number of staff members able to execute key job functions, and to increase the understanding across units in the library, as well as job categories. In their program they started with four volunteers. A structured program was devised which outlined the topics to be covered in each unit. The trainers of the program were their peers, members of the library staff. The length of the program depended on the depth of the learning curve. The staff evaluated the program and this was done via a survey on how staff viewed the project and if it was a success. One problem encountered during the program was that the home

unit was understaffed and an alternative suggestion was made. Even though the program did not solve all the problems of a severe staff shortage, it did improve the comprehension of the staff across the various departments regarding the levels of responsibility at the various job levels. The result was a successful program with a pool of trained staff, who were available to step in and help when an emergency arose. The combinations of site visits and cross training have strengthened a sense of community in a geographically dispersed and functionally separated organisation. Cross training has become an essential part of the services and operation of St. Paul campus library.

#### **4.3. Syracuse University on cross training program**

Froelick et al (2003:1) compiled a report on a cross-training pilot project implemented in 2003 at Syracuse University.



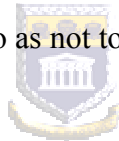
The participants were volunteers from different departments. The aim of the project was to cross-train all of the public service staff members of the academic library. The participating departments had the responsibility to provide for both the lending and borrowing participants. The time allocated was a few hours per week and the departments provided trainers for the trainees. The departmental heads knew their departments' needs as well as how the program may address the skills needed by their staff participating in the program. The core competencies and skills were identified for the staff to be cross-trained in the program. The benefits derived were for the department to be functional and to provide staffing in a crisis. Unlike other programs such as Albany University and Minnesota University discussed earlier Syracuse library

made use of a selection process, and a checklist prior to embarking on the training. The checklist was sent to the various departments for interested staff members. The checklist was useful for two reasons:

One, the borrowing department clarifies the areas to be covered in training, and two, the skills and competencies involved were listed. The checklist ensured that:

- The volunteers knew exactly what areas were to be covered
- It engages a matching process between the interested candidates
- After a training period, an evaluation of the training program transpires between trainer and trainee

In order for the program to be successful, an ongoing assessment and commitment is vital to the program. Unlike other multi-skilling programs, Syracuse encourages the participant to work in the lending department on a regular basis so as not to lose the skills acquired.



#### **4.4. J Murray Atkins library, University of North Carolina on cross training program**

At J Murray Atkins academic library at the University of North Carolina the academic library had to re-evaluate its needs based on the changing educational environment, and the needs of the students. In the year 2000, the university saw the completion of the library building renovation project and the re-organisation of staff services (Mozenter et al, 2003:401).

The question posed was how best to utilize the paraprofessionals at the reference desk in order to ensure the best possible service to students and staff, without causing the paraprofessionals to feel incompetent. The reference librarians were swamped with basic reference queries and

needed assistance. They needed the assistance of the paraprofessionals that could provide a basic reference service at the desk. The coordinator of the reference desk approached the coordinator of electronic services for database training for their paraprofessionals. A structured program was formulated based on objectives and information gathered from a questionnaire gathering session (Mozenter et al, 2003:401). Training was scheduled for one and half hours per week. Training focused on database training for the paraprofessionals. The aim of the training was to provide a broad overview of the various databases, demonstrate how to use the databases and the benefits of the databases for research purposes. On the evaluation of the training received, staff members reported on the objectives and expectations, the helpfulness of training material in meeting job responsibility, the effectiveness of the trainer and presentations. The findings of results were that the paraprofessionals and reference librarians were very positive. There were fewer complaints from users regarding service delivery at the combined service desk, and the reference desk focused on more specialized research questions. The confidence of the paraprofessionals improved. Improved service now existed at both desks. The paraprofessionals and the reference librarians understood each other's roles and responsibilities. The training session has become part of an annual training program. After the training, respondents requested refresher courses due to the changing nature of databases and interfaces (Mozenter et al, 2003:402,404).

#### **4.5. DeZelar-Tiedman on cross training program (University not stated)**

DeZelar-Tiedman (1999:30) focused on the skills of reference and the cataloguer, the benefits of cross-training, she looked at the negative aspects of a cross-training program as well as a

possible new model. DeZelar-Tiedman (1999:30) argues that there is a blurring of divisional distinction between public and technical services. An interesting remark made by DeZelar-Tiedman is that library administrators do not have consensus regarding what is technical and public service work. The introduction of automation has caused a certain degree of blurring between functions. Academic libraries had to respond to budget cuts and the needs of the users. The library directors had to capitalize on the unique combination of their own librarians' skills. The medium size libraries faced the challenges of embracing new technology and meeting the changing needs of the users, which led to the evolving roles of library employees of all types and all staffing levels. The library director must devise plans to address these issues (DeZelar-Tiedman, 1999:30).

DeZelar-Tiedman (1999:29-31) looked at the assumed differences of goals of a reference librarian and a cataloguer as well as their personality traits, and how best each can assist in the other department. At the reference desk, the cataloguer gains insight into how the library user asks questions and how to locate information. This increases the cataloguer's sense of accountability in that they are thinking how their work affects the users. On a practical level, the cataloguer can see the result of their work in the users' information seeking habits. This information enables the cataloguer to devise methods on improving their cataloguing skills. The benefits to the cataloguer are a decrease in boredom, variety in tasks and being in a less passive position. Through regular interaction with users at the reference desk interpersonal communication skill improved.

On the other side, the reference librarian's knowledge of user information seeking habits would be helpful in creating bibliographic records. Strong knowledge of reference sources can be helpful in creating authority work. Hands-on experience with cataloguing can give many useful insights that can assist them in their primary duties of public services. Contact with the new material before it reaches the shelves will increase the knowledge of the collection (DeZelar-Tiedman, 1999:29-31).

Burnout is a reality in all job situations but cross-training can add flexibility and variety to a job. Dual assignments make for more interesting and therefore more satisfying jobs. Cross-training may provide the opportunity for staff to pursue areas of interest which may arise in other departments in future. Having experience in more than one department can result in greater self-sufficiency as one might not need to pose many questions to a colleague if one has a greater understanding of operations in each unit. Most importantly, cross-training can improve communication and understanding between departments. A better appreciation of priorities and goals in each department, and the dynamics of each departmental task will foster greater respect among co-workers regarding their work. Cross-trained librarians will also better understand the interrelatedness of all library functions (DeZelar –Tiedman (1999:29-31).

#### **4.6. Ryerson University library on job rotation program**

Malinski (2002:675) focuses on cross training and looks at the advantages and disadvantages of implementing a job rotation program. He gives insight on some of the issues that might assist others in assessing their own organisation and the possibility of using job rotation. According to

Malinski succession planning is growing in importance. There is a great need for the organisation to pass on the tacit knowledge from the experienced staff to the new member of staff. There are many techniques to assist the organisation in the transfer of knowledge such as coaching, mentoring, training, and job-rotation (Malinski, 2002:675).

What are the difficulties experienced in implementing a job rotation program?

Some of the aspects looked at were that experienced staff do not want to learn new skills, staff do not want to relocate to other departments or branches, and the difficulties experienced in educating and training staff for new jobs. The staff skill level, job level, the pay structure and the cost of implementing a job rotation program all proved very difficult. Lastly, it was risky to put untrained staff in hazardous situations.



Malinski (2002:675) also addressed the issue of an unionized environment.

The focus is on three key challenges:

- The determination of the type of job rotation
- The clarification of the process of changing work structure
- The communication to staff about the type of staff training and the length of learning period

The job rotation may be within a particular generic job or classification level, Peninsula Technikon concurs with this statement (Peninsula Technikon (b), 2000:1). There may be significant skill differences among staff. Management may hesitate at the short-term experience of upgrading staff or at the loss of productivity during the initial training period. It may be easier to begin with a limited job rotation program with a certain segment of staff. Whatever the scope



and depth of program, the training and the learning period may be an important consideration in a unionized environment. Malinski did not address how the above factors relate in a unionized environment or if the union will object or disagree with the above factors.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

The six academic libraries had some common elements in their cross training programs, namely the aim of the program, volunteers to the program, the benefits, the evaluation of the program, the findings and recommendations. The management role is normally to give their approval of the plan. The aim at both Albany University and DeZelar-Tiedman program was to improve communication and cooperation between departments. The program was either structured formally or, in the case of Albany University, informally between staff. The benefits in all of the cross training or job rotation were very similar: to improve service delivery, job satisfaction, better understanding between departments, improved skills, and confidence. The evaluation was either via feedback, or between trainer and trainee, and in one instance at Syracuse University via a survey. DeZelar-Tiedman's account did not reflect the training period of the program and the evaluation of the program was omitted. Malinski focused on the implementation of a job rotation program and gave helpful insights on the advantages and disadvantages of implementing a job rotation program. He also gave his view on an alternative model regarding job rotation.

## **5. Aspects of multi-skilling as utilized in academic libraries in Birmingham, Australia and Canada.**

The literature search conducted focused on four academic libraries, one from Birmingham, two from Australian libraries, and one in Canada. The literature search reveals that in these libraries the multi-skilled program was a formal process, in which staff had to enrol but does not mean they will qualify for the multi-skilling program. Unlike in the American academic libraries, these programs were more of a general nature. There is not an exchange of staff, but rather staff members are trained in the other departments.

The nature of academic library work can be repetitive tasks, yet regular repetition of these duties makes an important contribution to an efficient library service. The repetition of these tasks can lead to lack of motivation, lack of focus and boredom. The key problem facing library managers is the negative attitude toward tasks, which can lead to further problems such as inconsistency and reduce the overall quality of the service, provided (Green, Chivers and Mynott, 2000:383). Academic library managers need to devise a range of strategies to deal with these problems.

### **5.1. Birmingham University library on job enrichment program**

Job enrichment is another way of changing the nature of work by providing additional responsibility of a more stimulating intellectual nature, meaning the assignment of more tasks. This adds variety to the working pattern of the employee and again gives a sense of satisfaction. The additional task needs to have meaning to the employee, if not the employee will see it as a burden (Green, Chivers and Mynott, 2000:384; Martel and Untawale, 1983:339).

At Birmingham University, the academic library is committed to providing job enrichment opportunities for staff at all levels of the organisation.

At Birmingham academic library job enrichment is one way of keeping the staff motivation level high. Job enrichment involves taking tasks from senior staff to the junior staff to enable the junior staff to have more responsibility (Green, Chivers and Mynott, 2000:383). Job enrichment is thus in essence about giving more responsibility. A task such as manual discarding of items can be enriched by adding the responsibility of removing the items from the library management system. Job enrichment can add meaning to a task by providing a challenge to learn something new.

On an individual level, staff can become more involved in determining the specific areas of responsibility assigned to them and their colleagues. A large number of routine administrative tasks occur in all the departments of the academic library. Staff who are involved in the decision-making process on the performance of these administrative tasks improved their productivity. Involving employees in decision-making, especially when the decision affects them directly, is both respectful and practical. Those closest to the problem have the best insight on how to correct it (Green, Chivers and Mynott, 2000: 382; Martel and Untawale, 1983:339).

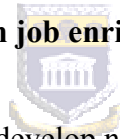
Staff indicated that a lack of training opportunities in some sectors is a major hurdle to career development. Professionals who had little or no opportunities for promotion within their own departments discovered that they lacked the skills required to move to another department. Such individuals felt they were stuck in their particular posts without any hope of developing their careers. Effective training in development skills in other departments of the library could

minimize this level of de-motivation and service delivery (Green, Chivers and Mynott, 2000:384).

### **5.1.1. Benefits of job enrichment**

By regularly allowing employees to change tasks and enriching the work, motivation levels can be maintained, because individual members of staff are frequently doing something new. Job enrichment may not increase motivation for everyone because some staff will be motivated by regularity and familiarity of their work and may feel resentful of the job enrichment program. It gives staff a wider knowledge of the library system, which can improve the quality of the operation (Green, Chivers & Mynott, and 2000:383).

### **5.2. University of Wollongong Library on job enrichment program**



Job enrichment provides an opportunity to develop new skills and gain broader experience and knowledge. It allows staff to assume tasks outside their job description. Job enrichment may mean working at a higher level (University of Wollongong, 2004:1)

Unlike at Birmingham University, at the University Wollongong the employees must apply to enrol in a job enrichment program. The following considerations are applied for an in-house vacancy:

- When leadership opportunities are identified, for example leading a quality team
- If a position is vacant for a period of time (due to extended leave by another staff member)
- When positions are identified to meet new or emerging services
- A person is required to work on projects for a designated time

### **5.2.1. Benefits of job enrichment**

Job enrichment provides benefits for both the individual and the library including:

- The opportunity to gain new skills and experience
- Provide variety within the work environment
- Motivating staff to apply for leadership opportunity
- Providing an opportunity to retain highly motivated and skilled staff
- Increasing the flexibility of the workforce, thereby improving efficiency

(University of Wollongong, 2004:1).

### **5.2.2. Period of job enrichment**

The period of job enrichment is determined largely by the nature of the position. The following are types of positions:



- Leading a project team may continue for several months but may constitute a small portion of the staff time during the week
- Acting in another position, whilst a staff member is on sabbatical or accouchement leave may continue for up to one year
- At the end of the job rotation period, the staff member returns to his or her original position unless the team coordinator negotiates for a continuation of the staff member's services in that position (University of Wollongong, 2004:2).

### **5.2.3. Procedure for job enrichment**

All permanent staff members are eligible to apply for job enrichment regardless of classification.

Successful applicants will depend on:

- A commitment to achieving library goals and values
- An aptitude to perform at the level advertised
- The ability to adapt to change

(University of Wollongong, 2004:1).

### **5.2.4. Evaluation of job enrichment**

Participants and their managers participate in the evaluation. Participants commented on the friendliness and helpfulness of the staff in the areas they worked. Participants generally

appreciated the opportunity to develop new skills and experiences in different environments.

Managers commented that the scheme enabled the participants to see how their own work fitted into the larger operational picture.

Some of the reported benefits of job enrichment are:

- Increased mental stimulation due to the variety or scope of the work
- Increased job satisfaction (University of Wollongong, 2004:1)


### **5.3. Queensland University library on job rotation program**

Changes in customer service, the increased use of information technology, greater emphasis on information literacy and changes in the organisational structure have resulted in academic library management to implement a job rotation program. This program will assist staff to adapt to the

ever-changing environment. Academic library management knows the importance of providing staff with opportunities for comprehensive staff development

(Schmidt, Lyons and Rutherford, 2004:11).

The challenge includes changes in the use of technology at the Queensland University library, changes in the wider environment, as well as in the higher education environment including the teaching, learning, and research priorities of the university. The academic library has stable a workforce with relatively low staff turnover. Staff employed at the university have been working for ten years or more in the academic library. The academic library management must ensure that staff remain motivated, stimulated by their work, skilled in the work that they perform and contribute to quality service that they deliver

(Schmidt, Lyons and Rutherford, 2004:3).  At Queensland University library, management noted that information and communication technology are not utilized optimally and that the physical facilities are inadequate. The library management reorganized the main library structure, and to some extent the branch structure, to focus on better service delivery. The organisation approach becomes increasingly user service focused in aspects of its work (Schmidt, Lyons and Rutherford, 2004:2).

Job rotation emerged as a priority from an annual planning session in 2002 at Queensland University library. The introduction and implementation of job rotation program between departments or branch libraries encouraged cross-fertilization of ideas, skills, and knowledge. Staff members were able to rotate into another area of the library for a fixed period of up to twelve months or do a shorter-term placement of one or more days per week in another

department. The program was successfully piloted in 2003 and has continued in 2004 with great success (Schmidt, Lyons & Rutherford 2004:7).

### **5.3.1. Benefits of the job rotation program**

Schmidt, Lyons and Rutherford (2004:8) outlined the benefits of job rotation program found at Queensland University:

- Mental stimulation and increased job satisfaction
- Foster excellent interpersonal and interdepartmental relationships
- The staff understood the broader functioning of the library to the staff
- The skills acquired can be used to apply for other positions within the academic library

### **5.3.2. Evaluation of the job rotation program**



The feedback received on the evaluation of the program, from the participants and managers were positive. Staff appreciated the new skills and the experience acquired in the other environments. Management staff commented that the program enabled staff to see how their work fitted into the larger operational picture. The job rotation program was successful (Schmidt, Lyons and Rutherford, 2004:8).

One of the challenges facing the Queensland university library is the low turnover amongst the staff. Thus, the risk exists that staff could become stagnant in their approach and less likely to try new opportunities. Job rotation allows employees to be trained in new tasks and ultimately contribute to their improvement through discussion and feedback to other staff. Job rotation



produces a more highly skilled and cohesive staff group, but needs effective management in order to be successful (Schmidt, Lyons and Rutherford, 2004:8).

#### **5.4. Succession planning in Canadian academic libraries**

Succession planning is a long-term process that involves everyone in the library. The focus must be on the long-term needs of the library, the needs of the community and its users. This process must be driven from the top and must focus on developing the right people for the organisation (Whitmel, [2000?]:92).

The Canadian academic libraries are facing an ageing workforce, and cannot afford to locate, entice, and groom the people they will need in order to move the organisation forward in the future. The academic libraries must employ strategies that will enable them to find the right person, within their organisation, to support their plans. According to Whitmel ([2000?]:91) it would be more beneficial for the academic library to groom people from within the organisation, it will be less expensive and the result will be more positive for everyone.

The overall goal of any succession plan is to attract, retain the people and the skills that the organisation needs currently and in the future. This is in accordance with a statement by Grobler et al (1994:316). The succession planning process must first identify the potential leaders and managers among those currently employed in the organisation. Secondly, it must develop in those individuals the necessary skills that they will need to further their growth

(Whitmel, [2000?]: 93). The succession plan process should involve a wide range of staff members. Getting everyone involved will ensure that a variety of concerns and issues are considered and addressed and will stimulate organisation wide commitment to its success.

#### **5.4.1. Benefits for succession planning**

The following are the benefits for an effective succession plan:

- Formalized managerial and supervisory training
- Job rotation and regular movement between departments and positions
- A list or database of individuals who are seeking upward mobility and who have leadership potential
- A formal mentoring program
- A clear indication from management and supervisors that the employees will have the support to achieve their career goals (Whitmel, [2000?]: 93).

All managers must take the responsibility to identify those individuals in the various departments who have potential leadership qualities and who positively contribute to the service (Whitmel, [2000?]: 93; Grobler et al, 1994:140).

#### **5.5. Conclusion**

At Birmingham, Wollongong and Queensland academic libraries formalized universities policies existed on multi-skilling. The Canadian libraries investigated the option of succession planning in their libraries due to their matured workforce. At Birmingham, Wollongong and Queensland academic libraries the staff must apply to enrol in these structured programs. At the end of each training period, the evaluation session is between the manager and the trainee. The benefits of

the training received as indicated at the above universities were similar in nature, variety in work, skills development, a flexible workforce, increase in motivation level and employers support the career goals of the employees. Unlike the African academic libraries, mentioned in the section to follow and the American academic libraries, the specific aims and the needs were not mentioned.

## **6. Aspects of multi-skilling utilized in African academic libraries.**

The literature search focused on three academic libraries where on-the-job training and job rotation training were applied in Nigeria, Kenya, and Botswana academic libraries. Like the American academic libraries, the programs were specific, but the benefits outlined were consistent with other programs such as Syracuse, J. Murray Atkins library, Birmingham, Wollongong, and Queensland. The focus might be different but the result was for better service delivery.

### **6.1. University of Ilorin, in Nigeria, on job rotation program**

At the University of Ilorin, in Nigeria academic library staff obtained diplomas and degree certificates which increased their level of awareness about the need to broaden their skills in the practice of librarianship. Some staff members have worked at one service point for many years, for example ten years and have never had the opportunity work in any other department or unit. Staff wanted to gain more skills and experience in the various units (Olorunsola, 2000:95).

### **6.1.1 Justification for adopting job rotation program**

The staff members have gained their degrees, and felt the need to further their training in the other areas in the library. Olorunsola (2000:95) provides the following reasons in adopting a job rotation program.

- Job rotation creates an opportunity to improve efficiency and productivity in the library
- Moving staff from one unit to another, serves as a training process for both professionals and other categories of staff
- Job rotation will remove monotony and enable staff to acquire more skills
- Job rotation removes the notion that a particular member of staff is the most suitable person for a particular job

### **6.1.2. Managing change**



Olorunsola (2000:95-96) commented that people resist change because they do not understand why changes are made. The introduction of job rotation will take care of job satisfaction of staff by increasing the variety of their work. If resistance does occur, it might be behavioral resistance, which derives from the reaction, perception, and assumption of individuals or a group in the organisation. Academic library managers need to create opportunities to improve efficiency and productivity and the only way to achieve this is to generate constructive change. It is important to realize that without change there can be no meaningful progress. In introducing change, staff must be consulted and therefore change will be more acceptable and successful. Job rotation in libraries, when introduced, is a change that will most likely lead to progress, since all change brings improvement.

Olorunsola's finding supports job rotation in academic libraries. The overall reaction to job rotation is positive. The limited negative responses received relate to the individuals' perceptions of change, which result in the resistance to change. Respondents' general comments indicate that job rotation is desirable if an effective and efficient service is to be attained. When introducing change such as a job rotation program, it is the manager's responsibility to devise strategies to manage change in the academic library. The staff members commented that in order to implement a job rotation program it must be well planned, and the right person must be selected. For a successful introduction of job rotation in academic libraries, the library manager needs to consider the practicality of job rotation (Olorunsola, 2000:97).

## **6.2. Botswana University on-the-job-training program**



Jain (1999:283) did an investigation at Botswana University regarding on-the-job training as a tool to train professionals and to improve productivity. In order to obtain a competitive edge in providing the best service to the customer, on-the-job training will enskill, and develop staff, which are vital to improve productivity. New professionals may require further training in other departments or functions within the academic library. Training may be required on a specific issue or when developing and opening a new service, for example an information centre. Paraprofessional and administrative staff need training because they may become stagnant within their positions and their performance becomes affected (Jain, 1999: 283). Training and development is important in developing a trained pool of academic library staff. This issue should become part of the organisational strategy and not an ad hoc issue. A lack of training causes ineffective services, a lack of self-satisfaction, customer dissatisfaction, and ensures lower

productivity, which results in poor service delivery. Well-trained individuals know the scope, expectation, and the depth of the work. They will be able to add building blocks to their professional work as they progress through their careers (Jain, 1999:283).

Training can be formal and informal. Formal training is acquired by obtaining a degree at a university. Informal training is like on-the-job training which is practical and prepares a person to use the acquired academic knowledge efficiently and effectively in the work situation (Jain, 1999:284). Academic training prepares a person with sufficient knowledge for the world of work. On-the-job training prepares staff for the practical world. Jain cites Campbell (1999:284) who states that on-the-job training is given in an employee's "normal" work situation it's being designed to change the knowledge, attitude, skill and behavior pattern directly, appropriate to the performance of a given task or job. The purpose is to improve the employee's working skill, efficiency and productivity which contribute to a better service delivery.

Jain (1999:286) ascertains that the needs identified by the staff for on-the-job training are: information technology, customer service, job orientation, marketing, refresher courses and managerial skills. The professional staff indicated that refresher courses are needed due to the constant change or new developments in the program for example the information technology field. The individual and the organisation must constantly update their knowledge on relevant issues affecting their work or they will remain stagnant (Jain, 1999:289). Professional staff indicated that due to specialization in their field, career development has become difficult, because they have no exposure in other departments or functions within the academic library, this concurs with Green, Chivers and Mynott (2000:384). A de-motivating factor for

professional staff is that changes within technology as well as changes which technology brings to their field at such a rapid rate, means that they cannot keep abreast with the new developments. Staff feel they have lagged behind due to changes in libraries, user needs and the communities. Owing to this feeling of inferiority, they seem to be de-motivated and consequently have a low level of productivity. Training is needed because the academic library forms part of the institution with a commitment to render a service of high quality at all time (Jain, 1999: 290).

### **6.2.1. Benefits of on-the-job training**

At Botswana University on-the-job benefits were listed as:

- Training may increase confidence, motivation, and commitment of librarians
- Training may provide recognition, enhance responsibilities, and reduce supervision
- Training may give personal satisfaction and achievement, as well as broaden opportunities
- Training may improve the level of efficiency, effectiveness and the general competence of staff
- Training may improve the quantity and quality of work and consequently the quality of service delivery
- Training may produce flexible staff with low turnover in academic libraries

(Ondari-Okemva, 2000:260 ; Jain, 1999:285)

The above benefits are similar to the multi-skilling programs in the American, Australian and Birmingham academic libraries.

### **6.2.2. The structure of on-the-job training**

According to the on-the-job training program at Botswana University, the program must have a structure.

- On the job training should be a structured program
- On-the-job training should have regular appraisal, clear milestones so as to indicate progression in the training
- On-the-job training should be consistent, effective, and cost- effective because the learning process is speedy and this allows employees become fully productive (Jain, 1999:286).

### **6.2.3. Evaluation of on-the-job-training**

Comments made at Botswana University on the evaluation.

Evaluation of on-the-job training can occur on several levels:

- Feedback on the program as a whole
- The individual participating in the program
- The influence of the program on the effectiveness of the library service (Jain, 1999: 286).

### **6.3. Kenya University libraries on-the-job-training program**

Ondari-Okemva (2000:257) conducted an on-the-job training program, at Kenyan academic libraries. This on-the-job training program was based on the training needs of practicing professional librarians. Jain conducted a similar investigation at Botswana University.



Ondari-Okemva (2000:259) cites Pepper (1992) who defines training as “being the organised process concerned with the acquisition of capabilities, or the maintenance of existing capabilities.” An organisation trains its staff to increase efficiency, boost morale, and to improve overall performance since these results in better service delivery (Ondari-Okemva, 2000: 257).

### **6.3.1. Benefits of on-the job training**

At Kenya academic libraries the benefits were cited under Botswana University library.

The differences from Botswana University were:

- Training will assist librarians to develop a positive attitude towards their profession
- Training will maintain effective performance and optimize the contributions to the achievement of the aims and objectives of the academic library

(Ondari-Okemva, 2000: 260).



Needs identified for on-the-job training were self-management, teamwork skills, communication, virtual librarianship and delegation of duty (Ondari-Okemva, 2000:260). Academic library managers at Kenya University libraries should provide opportunities for continuing training and education. They should encourage their staff to train on the job so that they can update their skills and competencies in readiness for the changes which are happening everyday.

### **6.4. Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the African approach to aspects of multi-skilling. The aims and needs were very specific to the academic library. At Ilorin in Nigeria the author investigated the

possibility of the introduction and implementation of a job rotation program. Staff gain degrees and they need to broaden their skills in the practice of librarianship. They subsequently embarked on an on-the-job training program. At Kenya University libraries the focus were also on the practicing professional librarians that needed additional skills to their qualifications. At Botswana University library the new professionals needed additional training to their qualifications. The aims of the three universities were very similar but their approaches were different. The benefits in all three libraries were very similar in nature such as to improve efficiency, motivation, to reduce boredom and to improve productivity in the service.

#### **7. Aspects of multi-skilling as utilized in academic libraries in South Africa**

At the Strategic Planning breakaway of the entire library staff of Peninsula Technikon in January 2000, Professor Johan Tromp mentioned in his opening speech that the library staff should break away from the narrow confines of their job descriptions. The staff members should embark on other duty ancillary to their present occupations. From the above statement, the concept of multi-skilling as applied within an academic institution arose. Staff at the breakaway felt that they wanted to be enskilled and empowered within their own department and other departments inside the library. What arose from the breakaway was the idea that the multi-skilling concept could be implemented at Peninsula Technikon academic library.

### **7.1. Peninsula Technikon on on-the-job training program**

The researcher was involved in the implementation of the multi-skilling pilot program at Peninsula Technikon in 2000. The rationale for multi-skilling was the optimal utilization of staff. After implementation it was hoped to use staff in other areas, other than their own, effectively and productively (Van der Westhuizen, 2000:2). The technikon has no formal multi-skilling policy. At Peninsula Technikon multi-skilling program was implemented laterally within a family of related jobs and ranks. Three levels were considered for the multi-skilling program, namely bookstack attendants, library assistants and librarians (Peninsula Technikon (b), 2000:2).

The aim of the multi-skilling program was to address the severe staff shortage suffered in the library. Multi-skilling would allow people to work in other areas. The participants involved were the bookstack attendants. They were multi-skilled in the form of on-the-job training at the circulation desk. This would address the severe staff shortage as well as the de-motivation, lack of job satisfaction experienced by the bookstack attendants. The head of circulation identified the objectives of the training and time allocation. The objectives were charging and discharging of material, renewals of material, fine payment by the users and registering new users. The period of training was scheduled for six sessions of one and half hour each. The evaluation occurred between the circulation head and the bookstack attendant. The trainees' comments were that they felt valuable and appreciated. They also felt part of the library staff and not so isolated (Peninsula Technikon (a), 2000:3).

### **7.1.2. The benefits of on-the-job training**

At Peninsula Technikon the benefits were:

- The staff was efficient in the areas trained
- Multi-skilling resulted in job satisfaction and increased in motivation
- Reduce the tedious and repetitive work of shelving all day

### **7.1.3. Disadvantages of on the job training were:**

At Peninsula Technikon the following disadvantages were:

- Having an individual train in one area of work, leaves a gap in his own area
- The trainer and trainee are both involved and this affects the productivity of the work

## **8. Conclusion**



Multi-skilling requires a formation of strategies from different sources to address the diversity of individuals' differences. This continual process needs reviewing and re-energizing. Academic library managers play a key role in ensuring that libraries provide an effective service by deploying various strategies to achieve their aim.

As the literature indicates there is a plethora of information regarding the various strategies that the organisation can employ to multi-skill their staff.

The forms of multi-skilling differ at the various academic libraries. The American academic libraries employed job rotation and cross training, while the Australian academic libraries and

Birmingham employed job rotation and job enrichment, the Canadian libraries used succession planning and the African academic libraries used on-the-job training and job rotation. In South Africa on-the-job training was employed at Peninsula Technikon academic library.

At Birmingham, Wollongong, and Queensland academic libraries, a formal university policy existed on multi-skilling, and at the other academic libraries a library policy existed. The programs at the above three academic libraries had a formal structure. At the rest of the academic libraries the programs were informal, but structured such Albany University.

The evaluation of the program was between the manager and the trainee, indicated at the Australian, African and South African academic libraries. At the American academic libraries the evaluation was between the trainer and trainee. The trainer is normally one of the peer librarians. The period of training at Queensland and Wollongong was from six months to a year, and at the other academic libraries the period ranged from a few weeks to over a few months. At Birmingham and Canadian academic libraries the training period was omitted.

One aspect that is a cornerstone of multi-skilling is the immense benefits derived for the individuals and the academic libraries. The similarities of the benefits across the academic libraries were:

- Contributions towards employee training and development; employee satisfaction; reduction in boredom; increased productivity; enhances job skills; increased versatility; career mobility and advancement; increased intellectual stimulation and confidence; enhances workers' flexibility and broadens their knowledge; achieves efficiency in the

workplace; helps break down barriers in efficiency which exists on many levels; better communication between the various units in the library; and better understanding of responsibility involved in other units.

Another cornerstone of multi-skilling is the contribution towards quality service provision within academic libraries. The improvement in the quality of service is illustrated by Gossen et al, Davenport, Johnson who advocate a flexible approach to training. The outcome of this flexible approach to training was the benefits achieved by the staff members as well as a better communication and relationship between the different functions of the academic library. The user experiences a seamless environment within the academic library setting. Davenport (1991:52) stated that the improvement in communication and coordination between the reference and catalogue units ensured that the users received better service delivery from the library. The outcome of this cross training assisted the reference librarian and cataloguer to assist the users at the various access points. Mozenter et al (2003:401) illustrated how quality of service provision to the users improved at J.A Murray academic library. The paraprofessionals were cross-trained to handle the basic referrals at the reference desk, the reference librarians were able to attend to more sophisticated research questions. Fewer complaints were received from the users. DeZeler-Tiedman (1999:29-31) asserts that cross training between reference librarian and the cataloguer contributed towards quality service provision within academic libraries. He further states that a better understanding of the interrelatedness of all academic library functions were achieved which contributed towards better service delivery within the academic library. According to Ondari-Okemva (200:257) an organization trains its staff to increase efficiency, boost morale and improve overall performance, this results in better service delivery. Jain

(1999:284) articulated that on- the- job training prepares staff for the practical world. The purpose of training is to improve the employee's working skill, efficiency and productivity, which contribute to a better service delivery within academic libraries.

### **Recommendation**

The researcher makes the following recommendations based on the readings, as well as being involved in a pilot program, of multi-skilling at Peninsula Technikon:

- The academic library management must consult with its staff members regarding the adoption of a multi-skilling program.
- A decision needs to be made with regard to the program: should it be structured or an informal approach.
- The academic library must decide which route to follow in the application of the multi-skilling program, example will it be job rotation, on-the-job training, job enrichment cross- training or succession planning.

The researcher's intense search on the specific terms: job rotation, cross- training, on-the-job training, and job enrichment as applied in the academic university libraries, failed to retrieve more relevant information on these specific terms in the context of South African academic libraries. The researcher focused on her institution, which implemented a pilot multi-skilling program in the year 2000.

Multi-skilling in its various formats is an excellent tool or technique to enhance the individual skills, competencies and experiences to develop the untapped potential of the employee, and

thereby creates an invaluable pool of human resources to utilize optimally to the benefit of the organization and ultimately effective and efficient service delivery to the user.





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