Broadening our Scope: International Collaboration for Retooling the Academic Library

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Abstract: The internationalization of higher education and the continuing expansion of technology as a means for learning and sharing information have radically changed the way in which academic libraries offer services and perform outreach. Retooling is essential to maintaining a vibrant and responsive workforce. Continual innovation on the part of training and development professionals is required to manage the expansion of relevant competencies. Through analysis of the current literature and using the results of an exploratory study, which engaged library associations globally, the author demonstrates the need and desire for increased international dialog and collaboration in the area of professional development.

Keywords: Academic research libraries, library training and development, international collaboration, library associations, retooling

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The shifting economic, social, and environmental dynamics of the new millennium created a perfect storm for the radical reimagining of the academic and research library. Perhaps most transformative was the explosion and continuing expansion of technology as a means for learning, creating, and sharing information. The ubiquitous use of computers and digital equipment, digitization of materials, electronic books, disputes with publishers, massive open online courses (MOOCs), privacy concerns, digital repositories, globalization, and the open-access movement are all heightened phenomena of the 21st century and direct results of the expansion of technology. The internationalization of higher education also contributed to radical changes in library services and outreach. Dewey (2010) summarizes the impact of this new environment in which the global research library must “address sweeping changes in technology transforming all aspects of creating, disseminating, and accessing scholarship in a multi-cultural world” (p. 4).

These realities heighten the critical importance of new and vital competencies for academic library employees – competencies that are aligned with reinvigorated visions and strategic directions. Brown states (2012) that “we have moved from an era of equilibrium to a new normal – an era of constant dis-equilibrium” (slide 8) where envisioning, learning new skills, creating, and implementing systems and procedures to respond to the rapidly changing academic environment require a vibrant, innovative, and flexible culture. According to Drucker (1999), a leader in the development of management education, “the most valuable asset of a 21st century institution (whether business or non-business) will be its knowledge workers and their productivity” (p. 79) where, “continuing innovation has to be part of the work” (p. 84) which “requires continuous learning on the part of the knowledge worker, but equally continuous
teaching” (p. 84). Library directors and human resource and organizational development professionals recognize the need to cultivate their “knowledge workers” through creative approaches to defining and organizing roles, recruiting and selecting personnel, and deploying and retraining existing staff that can conceive, build, and implement changes to ensure the most effective engagement of the library in the academy.

A natural outcome of the increasingly complex and linked environment of the academic and research library is a growing number of international partnerships and projects between individual libraries, consortia, and library associations. While a substantive body of literature addresses these large- and small-scale international collaborative efforts in such areas as direct services, policy advocacy, resource sharing, licensing, and archiving, the subject of international collaboration and sharing of best practices in the area of professional development is far less well represented in the literature and at conferences.

Using the results of an exploratory study, which engaged library associations globally, the author demonstrates the need and desire for increased international dialog and collaboration in the area of professional development.

**Literature Review**

**The Continuing Need for Retooling in the Academic Library**

The *New Media Consortium (NMC) Horizon Report: 2015 Library Edition* (Johnson, Adams, Estrada, & Freeman, 2015), a collaborative effort between the NMC, University of Applied Sciences (HTW) Chur, Technische Informationsbibliothek (TIB) Hanover, and ETH-Bibliothek Zurich, charts the landscape of emerging technologies for teaching, learning, and creative inquiry around the globe. The 2015 Library Edition international panel of experts
identified six key trends, six significant challenges, and six developments in technology. Among the “difficult” challenges listed, defined as “those we understand but for which solutions are elusive”, is “Rethinking the Roles and Skills of Librarians” (p. 28). Comments from contributors to the “NMC Horizon Report 2015 Library Edition Wiki” (2015) demonstrate the need to rearrange our organizations to fulfill new and more specialized capacities, embrace flexibility, increase collaboration and innovation, and be involved in the life cycle of research products. The “wicked challenges”, defined as “those that are complex to even define, much less address” (Johnson et al., 2015) are “Embracing the Need for Radical Change” (p. 30), and “Managing Knowledge Obsolescence” (p. 32). “Managing Knowledge Obsolescence” is considered a wicked challenge because of the continuing explosion of new information, knowledge resources, software tools, and devices. One wiki commentator opines that “Academic libraries will have to foster a new kind of innovative and entrepreneurial organization and mindset” (Stattin, 2015). Another states “most libraries are far away from agile, dynamic forms of organization. They are mostly still hierarchical and linear” (Mumenthaler, 2015).

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Environmental Scan 2015 (ACRL, 2015) identifies six areas for which further training and professional development are needed. Three areas are categorized under Research Data Services and include data-curation services, greater collaboration and networking on data information literacy regionally and nationally, and new and expanded roles to meet the data-management needs of the academy. Two important areas under the general heading Facilities pertain to library staff reaching a clear understanding of the institutional environment for teaching, learning and scholarship as well as gaining expertise in cutting-edge technologies such as mobile application development rooms, 3D printing, and makerspaces. The last area pertains to the library impact on students where
increased professional development is needed in the design and implementation of assessment activities.

In April 2015, four Nordic (Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, and Helsinki) university library leaders gathered to discuss changes and challenges for university libraries at a 2-day workshop. These leaders agreed that “the biggest challenge lies in the area of staff and management: how to develop relevant competences for the future, as well as getting staff motivated for change, while listening to their expertise and letting them develop their skills” (Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche - Association of European Research Libraries, 2015, para. 3).

Research Libraries UK (RLUK) Strategy 2014-2017, Powering Scholarship (2014) calls for “a Creative Community: Nurturing leadership, innovation and skills throughout the libraries” (p. 10) to address the dramatic changes in how research and learning are conducted. The heading for this strategy states:

We know that libraries are changing: the way researchers are communicating their findings is in transition and while collections remain at our core, many researchers and students value our services as much as our books and manuscripts. We therefore need the culture of our libraries to be ever open to change and innovation, and our staff must continue to be willing to embrace new skills and competences. In this way libraries will remain crucial components of the research infrastructure both in higher education and more broadly (p. 10).

Recognizing that the skills needed to lead libraries are changing, the Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche - Association of European Research Libraries (LIBER) launched an ambitious international Leadership Development Programme in 2011. This 2 year
program is led by the Leadership and Workforce Development working group, “features a combination of high-level workshops, training, and individual mentors” (Roche & d'Ascq, 2011, para. 3).

Many studies have reported on the changes in academic library work through the analysis of job announcements. One important study was conducted on vacancy announcements for professional positions advertised by ARL member libraries in 2011 (Sierra, 2012). The research focused on how research libraries are staffing for new and emerging jobs in the profession. The study reports that over half of the 444 job vacancies found were either newly created positions (30%) or had significantly redefined roles (24%). An analysis of information-professional job postings was conducted in June and July 2014 by San Jose State University School of Information (2014). This study, which was for all types of libraries and included over 450 positions, found that 51% of the positions required significant technological skills or were technology-centered jobs up from 32% in 2013; 70% of the listings emphasized the use of statistics or analysis, up from 21% in 2013; and 43% required management experience or skills, up from 32% in 2013. These are significant shifts within the profession in a short time.

It is evident from the literature and the strategic discussions taking place in academic libraries and professional associations that developing new competencies is a key factor in addressing radical change and shifting roles. Dramatic retooling is required where new skills and competencies include agility, technological expertise, enhanced cultural and linguistic diversity and sensitivities, innovation, as well as a capacity for engaging in deep collaboration. According to Jennerich and Oberg (2013), “Staff development is change. It is not capital-C change. It is an amalgam of small changes that take place in the behavior of individual staff members, which in turn can affect the whole team or unit of organization positively” (p. 4).
changing environment of academic libraries is felt throughout the organization, in our buildings, services, acquisitions, cataloging, technology support, digital capabilities, grants, operations, fiscal responsibilities, management, and human resources.

The strategic imperative of staff development in libraries arises from a core philosophy that the library must be user-centered and continuously evolving to meet user needs, and consequently, that staff must be constantly acquiring new knowledge, skills, and abilities (competencies) in order to accomplish the organizational mission and meet current and future user needs (Bowlby & Plunket, 2013, p. 29).

**The Internationalization of Higher Education**

In 2013, the International Association of Universities (IAU) conducted its 4th Global Survey. The results of this survey (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014), which included contributions from more than 1,300 higher education institutions in 131 countries, confirm that universities worldwide are actively internationalizing their operations. The American Council on Education (ACE) report, *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses* (ACE, 2012) is the result of a survey of 3,357 institutions. This report recognizes that educating for global citizenry requires a pervasive and comprehensive approach and indicates that internationalization has accelerated on campuses in recent years especially in the areas of internationalizing the curriculum, engaging in strategic partnerships with overseas institutions and expanding international student recruitment and staffing.

In 2013, the European Commission, the European Union’s executive body, launched a new strategy for the internationalization of higher education (2015) in an effort to address the challenges of globalization through changes in higher education. Immediately preceding the announcement and in anticipation of this new strategy, the European University Association
(EUA) conducted a membership survey dedicated to the issue of internationalization, which “demonstrated that 99% of institutions surveyed either have an internationalization strategy in place (56%), intend to develop one (13%), or have considered internationalization in other strategies (30%)” (EUA, 2013, p. 7).

*Internationalization of Higher Education in East Asia – Trends of Student Mobility and Impact on Education Governance* (Mok & Yu, 2014) examines the strategies of seven countries and universities responding to globalization and the unique challenges of establishing education hubs and transnational collaboration in East Asia.

In 2008, the African Network for Internationalization of Education (ANIE) was developed with the aim of “enhancing the understanding and development of the international dimension of higher education in Africa by expanding both knowledge and building, strengthening, and sustaining a cohort of competent professionals in this field” (ANIE, 2015).

The first Latin American and Caribbean Higher Education Conference (LACHEC) for the internationalization of higher education “was created as one of the most visible products of the Colombian network for the internationalization of higher education (RCI) in Cartagena in 2009, to reinforce the coordination of internationalization in institutions of higher education (IES) and other national and international institutions” (LACHEC 2015, n.d., para. 1).

Equally important is a study conducted by the European Association for International Education (EAIE) in the spring of 2014, “to map the state of internationalisation in Europe, as viewed by practitioners directly involved in the internationalisation of their institutions” (EAIE, n.d., para. 1). The results of this survey, consisting of 2,411 respondents from 33 countries, provide insights into the actual practices employed and challenges faced by institutions involved in internationalization. The study report finds that the main rationale for European higher
education institutions to engage in internationalization is, first and foremost, to improve the overall quality of education they provide and to prepare students for a global world (Engel, Sandström, van der Aa, & Glass. 2015, p. 4).

This focus on internationalization has been precipitated by a number of factors including the acceleration of a global economy, rapid advances in information and communication technologies that facilitate the production and transmission of knowledge, and the drive to address global challenges such as poverty, health, security, and the environment. Additionally, continued success in research and development output necessitates international collaboration (Witt, Kutner, & Cooper, 2015, p. 587).

Indeed, according to the International Association of Universities Call for Action, “irrespective of contextual differences within and between countries, nearly all higher education institutions worldwide are engaged in international activities and are seeking to expand them. Engaging with the world is now considered part of the very definition of quality in education and research” (2012, p. 2).

All of these efforts and initiatives demonstrate the growing focus of internationalizing higher education.

**International Collaborative Efforts between Library Associations**

The factors that are propelling the transformative and evolving internationalization of higher education are also at work in the academic library. The literature portrays a rich tapestry of themes related to internationalization, including deep organizational transformation and critical collaborative ventures. For the purposes of this study, we consider internationalization of the academic library broadly as referring to efforts within the field to respond to the demand for education, research, and services that are increasingly global and focused on diversity.
The benefits of engaging internationally and forging strong links globally are undeniable. In the article *How Diversity Makes us Smarter*, Phillips, senior vice dean and professor of leadership and ethics at Columbia Business School and an expert in the field of the science of diversity, states that “if you want to build teams or organizations capable of innovating, you need diversity. Diversity enhances creativity. It encourages the search for novel information and perspectives, leading to better decision making and problem solving” (2014, para. 3). Page (2007) provides strong though complex evidence for the value of diversity. He states that we implicitly understand “people with different life experiences and training, people from different cultural backgrounds, likely see the world differently. And those differences in perspectives can be valuable when solving problems or making predictions” (p. 16). While this isn’t always an easy way of engaging in a project, if approached properly, working outside traditional boundaries yields greater innovation and creative solutions, which is very much needed to develop and deliver training and development programs that meet the shifting priorities and needs of academic libraries.

The internationalization of the academic library is “an open symposium for facilitating exploration and exchange within an academic community, a meta-library ecosystem for powerful collaborative capacity, and a knowledge trust for providing enduring, barrier-free access for all research inquiry” (Neal, 2014, pp. 613–614). This effort has been a practical and entrepreneurial venture. We witness the creation of barrier-free access and an open symposium through the emergence of many large-scale collaborative efforts. This is exemplified by the global shift toward open access and the proliferation of institutional repositories with such collaborative efforts as Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), an international alliance of over 800 academic and research libraries from Australia, China, Europe, Japan and
North America; the Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR) with institutions from 35 countries and 4 continents founded in 2009 “to facilitate the global repository community of practice and a world-wide virtual repository network” (n.d., para. 2); and LAReferencia a network of repositories including nearly 100 institutions from nine countries in Latin America.

While we witness growth in the number of collaborative endeavors bridging regional and national boundaries in such areas as resource sharing, licensing, and archiving, the literature is scarce regarding the sharing of best practices and organizing joint ventures in the area of training and development of academic library employees. One notable exception is the Joint Task Force on Librarians’ Competencies in Support of E-Research and Scholarly Communication, a collaborative effort, launched in August 2013, between ARL, the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), COAR, and LIBER. The purpose of this joint task force is to create a toolkit that will help

build capacity in libraries for supporting new roles in the area of scholarly communication and e-research. The toolkit will allow library managers to identify skill gaps in their institution, form the basis of job descriptions, enable professionals to carry out self-assessments, and act as a foundation for the development of training programs for librarians and library professionals (Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche, 2013, para. 3).

The literature shows that the internationalization of higher education is fully engaged and that academic and research libraries have also created strong partnerships globally. We also witness transformative change taking place in academic libraries and the need for new skills and ways of working, which require increasing flexibility and innovation. This begs the question as
to whether or not there is a need or desire for greater collaboration and sharing of best practices internationally in the area of training and development.

Methods

Research Design

The Academic Library Management, Human Resources, and Staff Development Study of International Collaboration was conducted in 2014 as an exploratory study of library associations and their affiliates serving academic and research libraries worldwide. The study focused specifically on association committees, discussion groups, roundtables, sections, and other groups/units, referred to as library association groups, which were focused on management, human resources, and professional development functions. The goal of this study was to explore three research areas: 1) past international collaborative initiatives; 2) the level of interest in increased collaboration and/or sharing of best practices internationally; and 3) perceived rewards and barriers to engaging internationally. The research employed a mixed-methods design in which both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to collect data. An online survey, conducted in June 2014 and targeting the above reference groups, was used as the primary research method. In addition, a focus group was convened at the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) General Conference and Assembly in Lyon, France in August 2014. Qualtrics online survey software was used to create the survey, which included both closed and open-ended questions. Six questions addressed past collaborative efforts, their rewards and challenges. Ten questions focused on the desirability of future collaborative efforts, including one question each on the perceived disincentives and rewards to international collaboration.
General information on the participant library association affiliation, contact information, and interest in participating in the focus group completed the survey.

**Study Population and Response Rate**

The study population consisted of leaders (chair, co-chair, president, vice-president, convener, or co-convener) of library association groups focused on academic and research library management, human resources, and/or staff development. Representation was sought from international association groups from all 10 IFLA Congress sub-regions. IFLA has identified five general regions (Africa, Asia and Oceania, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America) which are further divided into 10 sub-regions: Region 1: South, Central and East Africa; Region 2: North and West Africa; Region 3: West and Central Asia; Region 4: South and East Asia; Region 5: South East Asia and Oceania; Region 6: North and East Europe; Region 7: West, South Europe and Balkans; Region 8: Caribbean and Central America; Region 9: South America; and Region 10: North America (International Federation of Library Associations [IFLA], 2006). Through online searches, and the use of Google Translate, a list of 84 relevant groups representing all 10 IFLA sub-regions and several international associations were sent a preliminary email to inquire as to their interest in participating and to identify the most appropriate person within the association to complete the survey. Of these 84 identified library association groups, 43 responded positively with a confirmed contact and were invited to participate in the survey; 35 library association groups completed the survey. Survey respondents represented three international organizations as well as nine of the ten IFLA sub-regions. The only sub-region not represented was South America. Figure 1 reflects the number of inquiries, invitations, and responses received by region.

*Figure 1.* Number of inquiries, invitations, and responses to participate in survey by region.
The objective of this exploratory study was to determine: 1) the extent and nature of past activities; 2) the desirability for increased efforts that enable international sharing of best practices, discussions of policy frameworks and strategies, and collaboration; and 3) perceived barriers and rewards to engaging internationally. Throughout the survey the word ‘group’ was used to reflect the respondent’s specific association committee or other affiliated interest group. Respondents were asked to respond to questions based on their role as leader within their association rather than on behalf of their respective library or as a venue for their individual perceptions.

Research Area 1 – Past International Collaborative Initiatives

Past international collaborative initiatives were explored in the survey with five questions: 17 participants indicated there had been no partnerships or sharing with association groups from other countries over the course of the last 5 years, while two said they were unsure. Of the 16
groups that reported activities, staff development accounted for the most instances (12), followed by library management (10), and human resources (8). These numbers are represented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Number of responses indicating engagement in international activities in the last 5 years by focus area.

For the groups reporting international activities, of the eight categories of collaboration provided, conferences/symposium (13) and speakers (9) were the most common forms. Consultations, presentations, projects, publications, and library fellowships were all selected by five or six respondents, while only three respondents selected research as an activity in which their group had engaged in international collaboration.

**Research Area 2 – Level of Interest in Increased Collaboration and/or Sharing of Best Practices Internationally**
The second research area included eight questions regarding interest in future collaboration and sharing of information with library managers, and human resources and staff development professionals from other countries or parts of the world.

Thirteen respondents “strongly agreed” and 11 respondents “agreed” with the statement, “Members of my group would be interested in learning of the work of academic library managers and/or human resources and staff development professionals from other countries or parts of the world.” Thirteen selected “neither agree nor disagree” and two participants selected “disagree”. Comments in response to this question included: “Learning of the work of other academic library managers is an effective way to remain current in this ever changing era of knowledge economies”; “I believe such opportunities would be very much helpful for professional librarians to keep the pace with latest technologies”; but also “I suspect that learning of management in other countries would be beneficial. For purposes now, however, our work is based on practices within the U.S. and possibly Canada and we are more focused on local issues.”

Four survey questions explored specific topics of interest. The data demonstrates (Figure 3) there is interest in connecting with colleagues internationally in all three study areas (management, human resources, and staff development) but that the greatest interest (extremely interested) lies in collaborating on staff development (12). Only one respondent, from the same institution, indicated a lack of interest in all three study areas.

**Figure 3.** Number of responses indicating level of interest in collaborating and sharing best practices by focus area.
Delving deeper into the content of each focus area, the survey asked participants to indicate the level of interest of their library association group regarding 12 specific topics (Figure 4): four in the area of management; five in the area of human resources; and three in the area of training. The topics selected by 20 (57%) or more respondents, were competencies, with the highest number of positive responses, training practices, strategic planning, training resources, and staff development. Topics selected by 10 (29%) or fewer respondents were employee relations, compensation management, and benefit package. The lack of interest in these last three topics was expected because these areas of human resources are governed by country, regional, area, and organizational specific rules and regulations and are consequently largely inflexible and, though interesting, may have little practical application to other library association groups.

**Figure 4.** Number of responses indicating topics of interest by focus area.
When asked to share additional examples of collaborative efforts which could be applied at an international level for library managers, and/or staff development and human resources professionals, five forms of personnel hosting were mentioned: fellowships (three times), staff exchanges (twice), visiting librarians (once), internships (once), and job attachments (once). Mentoring was also mentioned twice. In addition, various types of collaborative international training venues were indicated: short and intensive courses; collaborative workshops; international courses and programs; joint webinars; online courses; international conferences; and accreditation of continuing professional development activities, perhaps leading to international qualifications.

**Research Area 3 – Perceived Rewards and Barriers to Engaging Internationally**

Regarding past joint international activities, 13 (81%) of the 16 respondents who indicated having engaged in joint activities in the past 5 years, agreed or strongly agreed that the goals of these activities had been met. The top four rewards identified were the exchange of
practices (11), sharing of expertise (11), developing an international network (8), and discussions (7).

By far the greatest challenge of international collaboration identified (50% of respondents) was the cost (8). Technology and socio-cultural challenges were identified by four of the 16 groups reporting international activities.

Regarding future joint international activities, two survey questions addressed the perceived disincentives/barriers and rewards. Of the disincentive choices provided, illustrated in Figure 5, the cost of international collaboration was selected by 25 of the 35 participants (71%). Complicated logistics and lack of transferability of practices were the second most commonly selected disincentives, with 16 responses each (46%). The other issues identified were time commitment with ten responses (29%); increase in complexity of project management and lack of sufficient technology with six responses each (17%); and socio-cultural differences with four responses (11%).

Figure 5. Disincentives/barriers to international collaboration and/or sharing of best practices by number of responses.
Participants were offered seven options to indicate the rewards of international collaboration and/or sharing of best practices for their library association group (see Figure 6). Forty percent (14) of respondents selected all of the choices provided, indicating a strong emphasis on the benefits of working with colleagues in academic libraries globally. Twenty-four (67%) of respondents felt that engaging with other association groups internationally would encourage greater innovation. Twenty-two (63%) felt that by engaging more internationally, managers and human resources and staff development professionals would be better able to support the scholarly activities of the academic library, have greater insights into ways of improving internal processes, and strengthen their competence for providing responsive training opportunities.

Figure 6. Rewards to international collaboration and/or sharing of best practices by number of responses.
Focus Group Results

The survey included an opportunity to indicate interest in exploring the topic further by participating in a focus group at the IFLA General Conference and Assembly in Lyon, France in August 2014. Twelve respondents indicated interest in participating in the focus group.

This focus group was held on August 18, 2014 to present preliminary results of the survey in person and discuss the desirability for greater engagement of library association groups in international collaboration and sharing of library management, human resources, and staff development practices. Seven representatives from four library associations (ARL, the LIBER Leadership and Workforce Development Working Group, the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), and the American Library Association (ALA) International Relations Roundtable) attended the session.

Participants acknowledged the need to continue to internationalize the academic library in order to remain current and vibrant in the pervading internationalization of the academic institutions served. The open discussion indicated a clear and strong desire to increase opportunities for dialogue by creating stronger links internationally, collaborating, and learning from each other, especially in the area of staff development. Ideas for this included opening and encouraging applications from international participants to leadership training programs such as the LIBER Library Leadership Development Programme, the ARL Leadership Fellows program, and the Leading Change Institute programs. Participants also felt there would be great benefits to sharing curriculum design concepts.

When asked about the ways in which greater collaboration might take place, participants felt starting on a small scale, outside of any specific library association structure would be most productive. They speculated this looser affiliation might make for more dynamic interchange,
exploration, and innovation while creating strong international partnerships. Participants felt that the annual IFLA Conference and General Assembly could provide an opportunity for meeting in person, discussing collaborative efforts, and opening the opportunity to a greater number of library association leaders.

Findings and Discussion

A Connective Era

This study provides a snapshot of the expressed interest from geographically dispersed library associations to network and think beyond their national boundaries. Eighty-four library association groups concerned specifically with library management, human resources, and staff development in academic libraries were identified. Thirty-five of these library association groups, 42% of those contacted, completed the survey.

According to Lipman-Blumen, Bradshaw, Drucker, and Ito (2013) “few leaders have caught on to the fact that we have moved into a new historical moment, the Connective Era. The challenges this new era presents are markedly different from those of the recent past. In the emerging Connective Era, everyone and everything are connected” (para. 1). Given this setting of a dynamic, increasingly interdependent world, where institutions of higher education are struggling to keep up with the momentum of interrelatedness, it behooves academic libraries to accelerate connections and partnerships locally, nationally, and internationally. The new era requires a new type of leader and remarkably different skill set, knowledge, and behaviors.

In examining the results of the survey, we first note that while 46% of respondents reported prior collaborative efforts between their group and library association from other countries within the past 5 years, 69% strongly agreed or agreed that their group would be
interested in collaborating and sharing best practices. Only one respondent expressed no interest at all, while two were unsure. This indicates a strong desire for greater involvement internationally, affirming, “the urgent need to bring diverse groups together to solve serious mutual problems” (Lipman-Blumen, et al., 2013, para. 1) and engage in Connective Leadership.

**Training and Development**

Of the 16 groups that indicated past collaborative efforts, the highest number, 75%, were in the area of training and development. These activities included organizing conferences/symposium, hosting speakers, collaborating on presentations, and organizing library fellowships. Regarding future activities, the highest percent of respondents, 35%, were extremely interested in staff development with only 6% being unsure or uninterested. Twelve collaboration topic choices were provided to participants within the three study areas. The highest level of interest was in competencies, training practices, strategic planning, training resources, and staff development. While the survey grouped competencies under the human-resources study area, one might argue that the topic received a higher rating than other HR related topics because it is so closely related to staff development. McNeil defines core competencies as “the skills, knowledge, abilities, and attributes that employees across an organization are expected to have to contribute successfully within a particular organizational context” (McNeil, 2002, p. 6). She found that 76% of participants in the ARL Core Competencies Spec Kit survey indicated that establishing core competencies is “valuable for identifying current employees’ skill gaps” and “developing training programs for library staff” (p. 7). This again affirms the strong interest by survey respondents in connecting on topics that pertain to retooling, rethinking, and cultivating a workforce that is agile and responsive to rapidly changing priorities. Participants in the study’s focus group discussion, which centered almost
exclusively on leadership development, also expressed a clear need for greater connections internationally.

Survey participants identified the top advantage of connecting with other associations as encouraging greater innovation. One of the other top choices (63%) was to better understand and support training needs. The literature review supports this notion that in times of great change and permutations, organizations need innovative solutions and creative thinkers. Research also consistently indicates that diversity, by its very nature a gathering of different experiences, knowledge, and skills, fosters creative solutions by broadening perspectives. Leaders in library associations recognize that engaging together across traditional boundaries to solve deep organizational changes is a largely untapped venue that could be explored and may lead to important solutions.

Very few survey participants thought that socio-cultural differences would be a barrier to collaboration. This may not be surprising, given the proliferation of collaborative efforts in other important areas within the academic library, and it certainly supports the fact that, as a society, we are becoming more comfortable with working across cultures and learning from one another. The most tremendous barriers identified were cost, 71%, and complicated logistics, 46%. These barriers must be faced and addressed if training and development in academic libraries is to move into the Connective Era.

Conclusion

Innovation is required, and innovation is spurred by investigating, discovering, learning and thinking in different ways, expanding perspectives, and experimenting with models and ideas outside traditional boundaries. Judging by their responses, it seems clear participants in
this study realize that sharing knowledge and experience, cooperating in complex projects cross-culturally, and engaging with professionals who have looked at the same issues and come up with different answers, could inform and add value to the development of responsive training and development solutions.

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) describe communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). They go on to explain: “they help each other solve problems. They discuss their situations, their aspirations, and their needs. They ponder common issues, explore ideas, and act as sounding boards. They may create tools, standards, generic designs, manuals, and other documents” (pp. 4-5).

Academic libraries are faced with difficult and wicked challenges that would benefit from an international community of practice composed of professionals responsible for directing and managing change through training and development practices in their libraries.

This exploratory study presents opportunities for further research and creative dialogue regarding appropriate venues for the formation of a practical and influential community of practice.
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