

2008

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Recommended Citation

Oud, Joanne, "Adjusting to the workplace: Transitions faced by new academic librarians" (2008). *Library*. 3.
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Adjusting to the Workplace: Transitions Faced by New Academic Librarians

Joanne Oud

This article discusses the experiences of new academic librarians as they adjust to the workplace. In the process of organizational socialization, new employees face surprises and differences from their pre-existing expectations about the job. A survey of new librarians at Canadian university libraries was done to discover what these surprises were so that more effective training and orientation programs can be developed. Findings included several areas of high and low pre-existing knowledge and difference from expectation, including job skills and organizational culture. Implications for developing training programs are discussed.



Canadian academic libraries have little experience recruiting and integrating new librarians into the workplace because of a lack of significant hiring over the past decades. A hiring boom in the 1960s and 1970s was followed by a period of virtual hiring freeze that has only just begun to improve.¹ As a result, a significant percentage of academic librarians in Canada are eligible to retire within the next 5–10 years, a situation similar to that in the United States.² Projections of impending librarian shortages are widespread in the North American library literature, and, if these projections are true, libraries will need to work hard to recruit and retain good employees.³

Long-term retention is affected in part by the experiences of new employees during transition and adjustment to their new workplace, a process known as organizational socialization. Black and Leysen

note that, for academic librarians, “effective socialization is critical to the successful transition from graduate school to the academic environment.”⁴ Organizational socialization is usually defined as the process by which a person acquires the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior he or she needs to participate effectively as a member of an organization.⁵ Many aspects of a new job and organization are unfamiliar to a newcomer. New employees all bring expectations to their new jobs that are based on factors like their previous job experiences, their understandings of the profession, belief and experiences held by peers or family, promises made during recruitment, and their evaluation of the work situation during their interview.⁶ During initial socialization into their new work situation, the new employee inevitably finds that there are differences from what he or she expected. These differences produce

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some degree of “reality shock,” which is followed by a period of learning how to “fit in” and adjusting to how things work in the new setting.⁷

A substantial literature exists in the interdisciplinary field of organizational socialization. Researchers have investigated many aspects of socialization, including stages and characteristics of the process, methods that organizations use to socialize new employees effectively, and how characteristics and behaviours of new employees affect socialization.⁸ However, researchers in this field have focused on a relatively narrow set of occupations that does not include librarians.

Socialization of librarians has been discussed in the library literature, although not frequently. Existing studies fall into a few major groups. Studies in the first group look at the programs and methods used by libraries to assist in the socialization of new academic librarians.⁹ Studies in the second group focus on the socialization of academic librarians into the role of tenure-track faculty members. They compare the socialization process of new academic librarians with that of new professors, pointing out areas for improvement in graduate training and suggesting socialization strategies for libraries.¹⁰ In the third group, studies look at the initial attitudes and job experiences of new librarians.¹¹ Studies of how librarians progress through various socialization stages are rare; for example, Matthews reports on stages of transition for university librarians.¹²

Organizations need to understand the kinds of changes experienced by new employees during their adjustment to the workplace to formulate effective strategies for socialization. However, no research in the library literature, and little in the organizational socialization literature, has been done in this area. To fill the research gap, this study looks at changes experienced by new librarians using a conceptual model developed by Louis.¹³ Louis claims that the socialization process of new employees involves constant encounters with differ-

ences in the new job setting. Major types of differences include obvious changes such as a new office and phone number, as well as less obvious mental surprises where new situations contrast with pre-existing expectations and assumptions based on previous experiences. The amount of difference from these pre-existing expectations that employees face influences their adjustment process. Employees who face more differences in their transition period will have a more difficult adjustment to the organization, while new employees who enter with better knowledge of the job and environment have an easier adjustment process and are less likely to leave their jobs.¹⁴

This study uses Louis’ concept of the socialization process as an encounter with differences as its starting point. In particular, I hope to discover the type and degree of differences that new librarians face in their process of transition to their new workplaces, and the relationship of those initial differences to job satisfaction. I hope that the findings will help libraries to develop better strategies for easing the workplace socialization process, thereby helping to improve job satisfaction and retention of new librarians.

Methodology

For the purposes of this study, I defined a new academic librarian as a librarian with three years of experience or less who is currently working in a university library. Black and Leysen’s definition is similar in their survey of new librarians at ARL libraries.¹⁵

Difference, as defined in the study, has two components. The definition of difference includes how different various aspects of the job were from new librarians’ pre-existing expectations during their initial job experiences. The definition also includes the amount of pre-existing knowledge new librarians had before they started their first job as an academic librarian.

One limitation of the study is its non-longitudinal approach. Although a lon-

gitudinal study tracking organizational socialization from the first weeks of work through the first year or eighteen months would be ideal, it was not practical given the constraints of the study. Relatively small numbers of recent graduates are hired at academic libraries in Canada each year, and there are no common starting times or ways to discover hires scattered throughout disparate institutions, making it difficult to control survey feedback at consistent intervals for each participant. Therefore, the study involves a snapshot of the reported experiences of librarians new enough to remember their socialization process.

The study was done in two stages. In the first stage, semistructured exploratory interviews were conducted in person with six new academic librarians in summer 2003. The interviews gathered information about the librarians' organizational transition processes and identified issues that they felt were important in their transition. Interviews were transcribed and data analyzed for patterns and common themes. Based on these patterns, a questionnaire on initial job experiences was developed for wider distribution.

Four questions in the survey measured differences from pre-existing expectations and pre-existing knowledge of various aspects of their job. Two questions were scales made up of a number of items measured by a Likert-type scale, where respondents indicated the degree of difference from expectations or pre-existing knowledge of various aspects of their job. In addition, the survey included two open-ended questions: "When you first started working as an academic librarian, what was different from what you had expected?" and "What was the hardest thing for you to learn?"

University librarians or human resource officers at all 58 English-language or bilingual Canadian universities were asked to forward the names of new academic librarians currently employed at their libraries. Two libraries did not respond, and fifteen responded but had no

librarians with three years of experience or less. A total of 111 new academic librarians were identified at the remaining 41 libraries. Since the survey population was small, questionnaires were mailed to the entire population in spring 2004. A total of 97 usable responses were returned, for a response rate of 87 percent.

Results and Discussion

Differences Encountered

New academic librarians reported a relatively substantial degree of difference from their pre-existing expectations when they started their first job. Possible scores on the Degree of Difference scale are 0–45, with higher scores indicating less difference from expectation. The average respondent score is 29.82, which shows a moderate degree of difference. However, the lowest score was 11 and the highest was 43, which shows that there was a considerable amount of variation in the experiences of difference reported by librarians. Scale score statistics are summarized in table 1.

No relationship was found between the demographic characteristics of the librarians in the study and the degree of difference from expectation in their first job. Respondents' Degree of Difference scale scores were compared, using ANOVA tests and independent sample t-tests, with the age, sex, and salary level of respondents, the size and location of their library, the type of job they held (contract/permanent, part-time/full-time), and their previous experience (whether their current job is their first professional library job, whether they have prior ex-

TABLE 1
Degree of Difference Scale
15 items; Chronbach alpha coefficient .762

N	87
Minimum	11.00
Maximum	43.00
Mean	29.82
Std. Deviation	7.06

TABLE 2
Indicate How Different the Following Aspects of Your Job Were from What You Expected Before You Started Working as an Academic Librarian

	Same as Expected	Somewhat Different	Completely Different	No Prior Expectations	Mean	Std Deviation	Valid N
How much feedback you receive on your performance	19.1%	43.6%	25.5%	11.7%	2.17	0.946	94
When you can make decisions on your own	24.2%	52.6%	10.5%	12.6%	2.39	0.842	95
What gets rewarded and what doesn't	28.7%	36.2%	14.9%	20.2%	2.54	0.980	94
How decisions are made	29.5%	45.3%	12.6%	12.6%	2.42	0.870	95
How disagreements and conflicts are handled	29.8%	27.7%	20.2%	22.3%	2.54	1.054	94
What your role in the management of the library is	31.6%	34.7%	14.7%	18.9%	2.55	0.965	95
What projects/tasks are considered important	33.7%	48.4%	11.6%	6.3%	2.35	0.769	95
Whose opinions are considered important	35.8%	35.8%	12.6%	15.8%	2.55	0.908	95
How much assistance is available to you	36.8%	32.6%	12.6%	17.9%	2.60	0.927	95
How much authority you have in your position	40.0%	34.7%	18.9%	6.3%	2.34	0.858	95
How much initiative is expected of you	42.6%	31.9%	19.1%	6.4%	2.36	0.866	94
What managers' expectations are about your performance	47.4%	33.7%	11.6%	7.4%	2.51	0.797	95
How librarians are seen by others on campus	50.0%	33.0%	12.8%	4.2%	2.46	0.771	94
What the appropriate level of formality is in work relationships	50.5%	30.5%	8.4%	10.5%	2.63	0.786	95
What level of respect you are shown by your colleagues	57.4%	21.3%	13.8%	7.4%	2.59	0.822	94

perience in another career). There were no significant correlations between respondent scale scores and any of these characteristics.¹⁶

Confirming Louis' theory, the librarians in this study who reported a higher level of difference from expectations appeared to have a more difficult workplace transition. Transition difficulties are reflected in lower levels of job satisfaction for librarians with higher levels of difference from expectations. Degree of Difference scores were compared with reported job satisfaction using the Pearson product-movement correlation coefficient. The measure for job satisfaction consisted of an eight-item scale, which included items on satisfaction with coworkers, supervisor, job duties, work environment, salary, terms of employment, opportunities for advancement, and professional development support. There was a moderate negative relationship between degree of difference and job satisfaction scores [$r = -.355$, $n = 81$, $p = .001$], with higher levels of degree of difference associated with lower levels of job satisfaction.

In addition to the amount of difference encountered by new librarians and its relation to job satisfaction, I looked at which individual features of their new job and work environment were most surprising. Table 2 summarizes the responses for each scale item and is sorted by percentage of respondents who indicated "same as expected."

New librarians were most surprised by the amount of feedback they receive: only 19 percent felt that they got the amount of feedback they had expected. Another major area of surprise was decision making. Librarians felt that both the way decisions were made at their libraries and the ability for them to make their own decisions were different from their initial expectations. In addition, less than 30 percent of respondents felt that the system of rewards at their library and the way conflicts are handled were the same as they expected them to be.

On the other hand, initial expectations matched reality fairly closely in a number of areas. More than half of new librarians felt that the way they are perceived on campus, the appropriate level of formality in work relationships, and the respect shown by their colleagues were the same as they expected. However, most respondents reported a substantial level of difference from expectations overall; fewer than half of respondents chose "same as expected" for almost all items.

Librarians reported on other surprising aspects of their jobs in the open-ended question, "When you first started working as an academic librarian, what was different from what you had expected?" This question was included to discover whether new academic librarians had been surprised by differences that I had not considered, and I found that they had. New librarians mentioned differences from expectations in many aspects of their jobs that were not included as Degree of Difference scale items. The significant patterns of responses that emerged are summarized in table 3.

The surprise that new librarians mentioned most frequently in this question was the high degree of flexibility and independence involved in their job. This difference was a positive one for most respondents: "I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of independence I was given in terms of how I structured my workday and what kind of work I wanted to do.

TABLE 3
Difference From Expectations Open-Ended Question: Major Themes

- More flexibility/independence
- Greater variety of job responsibilities/tasks
- Bureaucracy, slow pace of change
- Negative workplace environment (politics, not collegial)
- Collegial workplace
- Busier/heavier workload
- Faculty and student attitudes to the library
- Difficult school-to-work transition
- Lack of training and time to learn

Being able to work on projects that I chose myself was refreshing." However, some indicated that this freedom came with a degree of ambiguity that could be difficult or stressful for them: "You are really on your own. You are expected to jump in and contribute and no one really tells you what to do. You have a lot of freedom to develop your own ideas, change existing processes, and make improvements; but, as a new librarian, I didn't feel that I was qualified to make changes and often I didn't know what would be an improvement."

Other positive surprises were the unexpected variety and diversity of job responsibilities and the collegial work environment. One respondent wrote: "I have a very diverse set of responsibilities. I expected a reasonably focused workload, but I have my hands in a variety of projects. It makes for a great job, but I wasn't expecting it." Others praised their workplace as more "friendly and collegial" than expected and commented that "I was encouraged to get involved, and as a new librarian my ideas and opinions were valued."

However, many respondents reported less positive surprises in their workplace. The slow pace of change and the bureaucratic nature of the academic library workplace were the most commonly mentioned frustrations. Many respondents commented on their initial surprise at the number of committees and meetings and found that "things take a long time to get done. So much paperwork. Everything has a lengthy unnecessary process. Too many policies on mundane things."

Many new librarians also commented on negative surprises related to their workplace culture and environment, including "unmotivated" or "negative" colleagues and a higher than expected level of workplace politics. Some librarians were also surprised at a lack of teamwork and a noncollegial environment: "I expected there to be a high degree of collegiality and team work, but I found that most librarians prefer autonomy in their

offices and as little personal interaction as possible. I've found the experience as an academic librarian much more isolating than accepting." Another group of respondents mentioned surprise at the degree of difference and hierarchy between librarians and paraprofessionals in the workplace. Others were surprised at faculty and student attitudes toward the library and said that they had generally expected a higher level of enthusiasm and respect from those groups.

Another group of responses focused on the higher than expected workload. This was generally not mentioned as a complaint but as a genuine surprise: "We are really busy!" and "I knew that there was a lot of work to do, but I didn't realize how many balls needed to be in the air at one time." Some respondents commented on the unexpected encroaching of work on their nonwork hours: "I knew that academic librarians were busy, but I still expected to have time to take lunch, which doesn't happen often." However, a number of respondents mentioned that their work duties were easier than expected. In particular, several librarians found that the reference questions they dealt with were easier than they had assumed they would be and that their actual reference duties took up less of their time and energy at work than they had expected, given its emphasis in library school. Relatively few respondents, however, mentioned any aspects of their daily job tasks as a source of difference from their initial expectations; instead, most responses focused on aspects of the workplace culture and environment.

Finally, a number of librarians mentioned surprise at the difficulty of their transition from being a student to being a professional: "The transition from school to work was more difficult than I thought it would be. Thus, in the beginning it was difficult to get my head around everything. I guess I did not think that being in a university environment as a student and then working in the same environment as a professional would be much different

but it was." Related comments focused on the amount to be learned at one time and the surprise at both the lack of training and the short time allowed to get up to speed: "The amount I was expected to know as an 'expert' was overwhelming. That people immediately began referring people to me after one week came as a shock."

Pre-Existing Knowledge

New librarians were asked about their pre-existing knowledge of various parts of their job when they first started working as academic librarians. Responses were measured by a Pre-Existing Knowledge scale made up of 19 items. Unlike the amount of difference from expectation, the amount of pre-existing knowledge of the job did not affect job satisfaction. No significant relationship was found between Pre-Existing Knowledge scores and job satisfaction scores.

Respondents' pre-existing knowledge scores were also compared with their demographic characteristics using ANOVA tests and independent sample t-tests. There was no statistically significant relationship between the amount of pre-existing knowledge and age, sex, salary level, size or location of library, or type of job (contract/permanent, full-time/part-time).

However, respondents' previous experience did make a difference. There was a significant difference between responses from librarians who were in their first professional library job and responses from those who weren't. This variable, which was measured by a yes or no response in the survey, was compared to respondents' Pre-Existing Knowledge scale scores using an independent samples t-test. There was a statistically significant difference in scores for those who are in their first professional library position ($M=37.89$, $SD=8.84$) and those who aren't ($M=42.49$, $SD=10.12$; $t(91)=-2.314$, $p=.023$). The magnitude of differences in the means is moder-

ate ($\eta^2=.056$). Therefore, the data file was split and responses were analyzed separately for librarians who answered yes and no to "Is this your first professional library job?" so that any differences would be more evident.

Both groups reported medium levels of pre-existing knowledge of their job when they first started, but librarians with prior experience reported lower average levels of pre-existing knowledge than those in their first professional position. Pre-existing Knowledge scale scores for both groups are summarized in table 4. The possible range of scores is 0–76, with a higher score indicating less pre-existing knowledge. For those in their first librarian position, the mean score is 37.89. The lowest score is 21, and the highest is 65. For those who are not in their first librarian position, the mean score is 42.48, the lowest score is 19, and the highest is 67.

In addition to general levels of pre-existing knowledge, I analyzed which parts of their job new librarians knew most and least about when they started. Table 5 summarizes responses from librarians in their first professional position to individual items in the Pre-Existing Knowledge scale and is sorted by percentage of respondents who indicated "knew well" for each item.

New librarians in their first professional position reported relatively low pre-existing knowledge in a number of aspects of their jobs. They reported especially low pre-existing knowledge in two

TABLE 4
Pre-Existing Knowledge Scale
19 items; Chronbach alpha coefficient .864

	First Librarian Job—Yes	First Librarian Job—No
N	56	37
Minimum	21	19
Maximum	65	67
Mean	37.89	42.48
Standard Deviation	8.84	10.12

TABLE 5
Indicate How Much You Already Knew About the Following Aspects of Your Job When You Started Working as an Academic Librarian. Respondents: First Professional Library Job

	Knew Well	Knew Some	Knew just a Little	Knew Nothing	N/A	Mean	Std Deviation	Valid N
How to deal with library politics	5.3%	29.8%	29.8%	33.3%	1.8%	2.88	1.001	57
How to select resources for the library collection	5.3%	33.3%	42.1%	14.0%	5.3%	2.54	0.983	57
How to say no to assignments/projects	12.3%	26.3%	40.4%	15.8%	5.3%	2.49	1.071	57
How to do outreach or public relations with faculty	14.0%	22.8%	38.6%	19.3%	5.3%	2.53	1.120	57
How to interact with faculty	15.8%	36.8%	29.8%	15.8%	1.8%	2.42	0.999	57
How to express disagreement effectively	17.9%	48.2%	25.0%	5.4%	3.6%	2.11	0.888	56
How to perform my core job duties	19.3%	66.7%	14.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.95	0.580	57
How to say things in meetings so people will listen	22.8%	38.6%	19.3%	17.5%	1.8%	2.28	1.065	57
How to interact with librarians who have higher status	26.3%	42.1%	24.6%	5.3%	1.8%	2.05	0.895	57
How to work well under tight scrutiny	26.3%	33.3%	12.3%	7.0%	0.0%	1.58	1.164	57
How to do effective library instruction	28.1%	28.1%	36.8%	7.0%	0.0%	2.23	0.945	57
How to manage projects effectively	31.6%	43.9%	17.5%	5.3%	1.8%	1.93	0.884	57
How to determine workload priorities	35.1%	43.9%	19.3%	1.8%	0.0%	1.88	0.781	57
How to work well on committees or teams	38.6%	38.6%	17.5%	1.8%	3.5%	1.75	0.851	57
How to manage a heavy workload	54.4%	31.6%	12.3%	1.8%	0.0%	1.61	0.774	57
How to work well with little supervision	57.9%	28.1%	14.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.56	0.732	57
How to write effective e-mail	61.4%	24.6%	10.5%	1.8%	1.8%	1.49	0.782	57
How to work on several projects at once	61.4%	28.1%	10.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.49	0.685	57
How to interact with students	70.2%	24.6%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	1.35	0.582	57

areas: dealing with workplace politics and selecting resources for the library collection. Only 5 percent of respondents felt that they knew how to do these things well when they first started working as academic librarians. Other areas with low reported pre-existing knowledge include how to say no to projects, how to do outreach and public relations, and how to interact with faculty. A relatively high proportion of new librarians also indicated that they started work knowing little or nothing about how to do effective library instruction.

New librarians in their first professional positions did report a fairly high level of knowledge of some aspects of their jobs when they started. Areas with the highest reported level of pre-existing knowledge were how to manage a heavy workload, how to work well with little supervision, how to write effective e-mail, how to work on several projects at once, and how to interact with students.

Librarians who are not in their first professional position reported lower levels of pre-existing knowledge both in their mean scale scores and in their responses to individual items. Table 6 summarizes responses to scale items. In general, respondents in this group were less likely to select "knew well" and more likely to select "knew just a little" or "knew nothing." In nearly all items, less than 10 percent of respondents selected "knew well." By contrast, "knew well" was chosen by more than 50 percent of respondents for only one item.

Librarians in this group and librarians in their first professional position reported that they had high and low levels of pre-existing knowledge for similar items, but in a slightly different order. New librarians who are not in their first job report that the areas with the lowest level of knowledge are how to say no to assignments/projects and how to select resources for the library collection. Other areas with low reported pre-existing knowledge include how to say things in meetings so people will listen, how to

do outreach and public relations, how to interact with faculty, how to express disagreement effectively, and how to deal with workplace politics. Librarians in this group felt that they knew most how to work well with little supervision, how to manage a heavy workload, how to multitask, how to write effective e-mail, and how to interact with students. Members of this group had somewhat more confidence in their initial knowledge of core job duties and in how to do effective library instruction than the group of librarians in their first professional position.

In addition to the pre-existing knowledge scale, new librarians were asked an open-ended question, "What was the hardest thing for you to learn?" to find out what knowledge gaps created the most difficulty for them in their learning process. Several major patterns emerged in the responses and are summarized in table 7.

Scale items and patterns found in the open-ended question overlapped each other substantially. Many of the scale items with low levels of reported pre-existing knowledge were also reported as being hard to learn. Library politics, often mentioned as the hardest thing to learn, also had a very low level of reported pre-existing knowledge as a scale item. Other areas frequently mentioned as difficult to learn include collection development duties, saying no to new projects, establishing effective relationships with faculty, and managing conflict. These areas correspond to scale items "how to select resources for the library collection," "how to say no to assignments/projects," "how to interact with faculty," and "how to express disagreement effectively," all of which had low scores for pre-existing knowledge.

The most frequently mentioned area of learning difficulty not present in the scale items was "getting things done." In this area, new librarians mentioned concerns such as when and how to take initiative, how to work around difficult supervisors, dealing with resistance to change,

TABLE 6
Indicate How Much You Already Knew About the Following Aspects of Your Job When You Started Working as an Academic Librarian. Respondents: Not First Professional Library Job

	Knew Well	Knew Some	Knew just a Little	Knew Nothing	N/A	Mean	Std Deviation	Valid N
How to say no to assignments/projects	5.1%	20.5%	17.9%	51.3%	5.1%	3.05	1.191	39
How to select resources for the library collection	5.1%	25.6%	28.2%	25.6%	15.4%	2.44	1.353	39
How to say things in meetings so people will listen	5.1%	35.9%	30.8%	25.6%	2.6%	2.72	0.999	39
How to do outreach or public relations with faculty	7.7%	23.1%	33.3%	30.8%	5.1%	2.77	1.135	39
How to interact with faculty	7.7%	43.6%	43.6%	17.9%	2.6%	2.62	1.067	39
How to express disagreement effectively	7.7%	43.6%	33.3%	15.4%	0.0%	2.56	0.852	39
How to deal with library politics	10.3%	28.2%	33.3%	28.2%	0.0%	2.79	0.978	39
How to interact with librarians who have higher status	17.9%	38.5%	28.2%	15.4%	0.0%	2.41	0.966	39
How to do effective library instruction	17.9%	48.7%	25.6%	5.1%	2.6%	2.13	0.864	39
How to work well under tight scrutiny	17.9%	38.5%	17.9%	7.7%	17.9%	1.79	1.174	39
How to work well on committees or teams	20.5%	30.8%	25.6%	20.5%	2.6%	2.41	1.117	39
How to determine workload priorities	20.5%	41.0%	25.6%	12.8%	0.0%	2.31	0.950	39
How to manage projects effectively	26.3%	34.2%	31.6%	7.9%	0.0%	2.21	0.935	38
How to perform my core job duties	26.3%	36.8%	31.6%	5.3%	0.0%	2.16	0.886	38
How to manage a heavy workload	35.9%	35.9%	20.5%	5.1%	2.6%	1.90	0.940	39
How to work on several projects at once	38.5%	41.0%	17.9%	2.6%	0.0%	1.85	0.812	39
How to write effective e-mail	48.7%	33.3%	7.7%	10.3%	0.0%	1.79	0.978	39
How to interact with students	48.7%	41.0%	10.3%	0.0%	0.0%	1.62	0.673	39
How to work well with little supervision	61.5%	35.9%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	1.41	0.549	39

and getting people to listen to their ideas. Others phrased their difficulties as learning “how to navigate the bureaucratic jungle” and “learning how the system functions (how decisions are made, where funding comes from, how best to propose projects or changes).”

New librarians reported other difficult-to-learn areas, including local procedures for doing things, local collections and resources, and local structures. In particular, several respondents mentioned the difficulty of learning the structures and cultures of various areas within the university, commenting that “the library environment is familiar but the university is not.” Although many respondents felt in the pre-existing knowledge scale that they were comfortable managing a heavy workload, this area was frequently mentioned as a difficult skill to learn in the open-ended question. Respondents reported that it was difficult to learn “to spend my time most effectively and make time for everything I need to do” and “time management, multitasking, balancing changing priorities, dealing with constant interruptions.”

Implications

In summary, the results of this study identify aspects of new academic librarians’ jobs that are different from their initial expectations, as well as areas where they have gaps in their pre-existing knowledge. Louis and other researchers found that a high degree of difference led to more difficulties in adjustment to the workplace, and this study supports those findings. New librarians with a higher degree of difference from expectation in their initial job experiences have lower levels of job satisfaction. Levels of pre-existing knowledge, however, do not appear to have an impact on job satisfaction. Demographic variables such as sex, age, and salary do not have a significant impact on either degree of difference or pre-existing knowledge, although new

TABLE 7
Hardest Thing to Learn Open-Ended Question: Major Themes

- Workplace politics/culture
- How to get things done
- Collection development
- Local procedures, resources, structures
- Time management/workload management
- Saying no
- Conflict management
- Relationships with faculty

librarians with previous professional experience did report lower average pre-existing knowledge. Since the study did not include questions on cultural, racial, or linguistic diversity, additional research should be done to determine if these variables do influence experiences of difference from expectations.

A goal for this study was to provide information to help libraries develop effective ways to ease workplace transitions for new librarians. As Louis claims, an “appreciation of changes, contrasts and surprises characteristic of newcomers entry experiences is essential in designing organizational structures that facilitate newcomer transitions.”¹⁷ What practical implications do the findings have for designing strategies to ease initial job transitions?

Since high levels of difference from expectation are related to difficult transitions and low job satisfaction, one strategy libraries can use to facilitate workplace transition is to minimize the amount of difference from expectation. New employees’ pre-existing expectations come from many past experiences, but employers can have an effect on some of these expectations during the recruiting and hiring process. Libraries can try to convey more reasonable expectations to candidates by paying careful attention to advertising and communication during and outside the interview and by giving accurate depictions of the job and the work environment. One method of ensuring that candidates or new employees have a more realistic understanding of

the job and the workplace is the realistic job preview. Realistic job previews are increasingly used in the business world to give applicants a more accurate picture of the job, and initial studies show that they are effective in producing increased performance and lower turnover in new employees.¹⁸ Realistic job previews use methods including brochures, detailed and specific job descriptions, discussions with potential coworkers, and opportunities for on-the-job observation to ensure that candidates have a solid understanding of what the job involves. This kind of tactic may help create more accurate expectations in new employees and, therefore, help with their adjustment process.

However, even with these measures, some degree of difference from expectation is inevitable in new job settings. Therefore, libraries need to develop good strategies to help the new librarian deal with these surprises as they arise in the first several months of employment. Training and orientation programs are the most common strategies used to facilitate workplace transitions, and the results of this study point out some areas where such programs could be augmented or developed.

First, the results confirmed that most new academic librarians would benefit from more assistance in their adjustment to their new workplace. Respondents reported relatively high levels of difference from expectation and relatively low levels of pre-existing knowledge in many aspects of their new jobs. However, in many academic libraries the new librarian is left to learn much of the job informally or on his or her own initiative: only 40 percent of respondents indicated that they had been offered any kind of formal orientation or training. These findings are similar to the findings of a major survey of Canadian libraries, *The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries*. Researchers in that study voiced concerns over potentially large gaps in training, since nearly half of new librarians they surveyed reported

that their training was inadequate for them to do their jobs well.¹⁹

The same study points out that "few institutions had formal structures either for determining what training is needed or for evaluating that training."²⁰ More formal, structured training programs would help address this gap and benefit both the new librarian and the library. Many researchers in organizational socialization have found a need for structured training programs in producing effective new employee socialization. Ashforth and Saks point out that a relatively formal, structured approach to new employee socialization helps lower stress, conflict, and ambiguity for new employees.²¹ Holton finds that "individuals were not using many deliberate strategies to adapt to their organizations, indicating enormous ignorance of the importance of the transition to work... This reinforces the notion that more interventions are needed in organizations and universities to teach organizational entry skills and strategies."²²

Most existing library orientation and training programs are focused on local procedures and specific job tasks and skills.²³ Clearly, training in these core areas of the job is essential. However, job tasks were not commonly mentioned either as areas of difference of expectation or of low pre-existing knowledge by survey respondents. The most notable exception is collection development, which rated low in pre-existing knowledge and high in difficulty of learning. Respondents mentioned frequently that they had little training in this area in library school and that their on-the-job training was lacking or inadequate. New librarians who had previous professional library experience did not feel better prepared for collection development duties. This is not surprising, since many short-term contracts and part-time positions do not include collection development components. Outreach with faculty and library instruction are also areas of the job that respondents identified as difficult initially, and neither

are commonly included in library training and orientation programs. Clearly, these three areas require further attention in training programs that cover job responsibilities.

The majority of areas identified by respondents as having either high difference from expectation or low prior knowledge, however, are related to the workplace environment. These areas involve the organization's culture, or the unwritten rules of "how things work around here."²⁴ Organizational culture often involves the aspects of the workplace that long-term employees take for granted and therefore may not think worthy of mention to new staff. Research has found that these major sources of knowledge gaps and differences are generally not recognized or understood well by schools, workplaces, or even new graduates themselves.²⁵ It is not surprising, then, that training for new librarians seldom includes aspects of the organization's culture, although librarians reported that these aspects were often the most different from their expectations and the most difficult for them to learn. For example, training programs rarely cover how to deal with library politics, how to work with a difficult supervisor, how to speak in meetings effectively, or how to manage conflict. In addition, training programs are usually short and concentrated in the first few weeks of employment, while many of the "cultural" adjustments in the initial workplace transition take six to nine months or more.²⁶

Given the difficulties reported by new librarians with learning the cultural aspects of their new jobs and workplaces, more effort should be made to develop ways to assist new employees in this critical area of their transition process. There are few models outlining what an effective training program for organizational culture might include. In Holton's model, there are four major areas of content that a new employee needs to learn about in a new job: the individual domain (including personal attitudes, expectations, and skills needed to adjust), the people

domain (including relationships with coworkers and supervisors), the organization domain (including organizational culture and roles), and the work task domain (including job skills). Training and orientation programs should integrate and address all four of these areas in a planned way, through a variety of programs and interventions that last for an employee's first year.²⁷

In such a training program, there are likely to be many different tactics necessary for training in different areas. One specific strategy for assisting new librarians in the more nebulous areas of organizational culture is to assign a mentor or peer buddy. Mentoring has been well documented and researched as an effective strategy for career development,²⁸ but it has also been researched and recommended as a effective strategy for new employee workplace adjustment. ACRL's White Paper on recruitment and retention recommends mentoring as a retention strategy for academic libraries, and research on information technology professionals has shown that social and interpersonal strategies like mentoring has the most significant effect on new employees' adjustment process.²⁹

Mentoring is a potentially useful strategy for multiple reasons. At the most basic level, having a mentor means that new librarians have someone they can ask when they are confused or need information. New employees need to proactively seek out information to help them adjust to their new environment,³⁰ but they may be hesitant because they are afraid that others will think that they are incompetent or lacking key knowledge.³¹ Workplace socialization research has shown that having a mentor or peer buddy is helpful because it provides the new employee someone whose purpose is to help and who expects questions.³² Research has also shown that people are more likely to proactively ask questions and seek out information when they have someone accessible for that purpose and have a good relationship with that per-

son.³³ Mentors can help new employees interpret incidents that happen in the new workplace and therefore gain a better sense of the organizational culture and how it operates in various situations.³⁴

However, mentors are often arranged after the employee has been on the job for some time, and mentoring is usually more focused on long-term career development than short-term adjustment. To be useful to new employees during the 6–9 months of their adjustment process, it would make sense to have a short-term initial mentor assigned for that period. Having a mentor available from the beginning, especially to help with questions about intangible areas of the organization's culture, could be a useful socialization strategy for new librarians.

Even if a mentoring program is not possible, scheduling regular opportunities with supervisors or peers for feedback and discussion would give new librarians an opportunity to ask questions and bring up areas of difficulty or confusion. Ideally, formal or informal training programs should let new employees

know explicitly what issues may arise during their transition to the new workplace and what skills and strategies might be helpful for them to deal with their adjustment process.³⁵ However, people are often not aware of these areas of potential difficulty. Holton points out that it may be necessary to train existing coworkers and supervisors in what potential difficulties a new employee might encounter, since people who have worked in an organization for some time tend to forget what newcomers don't know.³⁶ Having some open discussion, for both existing and new employees, would help to foster an environment where new librarians feel more comfortable asking for help and would stimulate awareness by both new and existing librarians of what issues and questions may arise. This kind of awareness is a first step in creating new kinds of training and orientation programs to help new librarians deal with the surprises they encounter in their new work environment and, therefore, in improving long-term job satisfaction and retention.

Notes

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