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Robert P. Holley

Wayne State University, aa3805@wayne.edu

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Column Title: Education and Training for Library Management

Column Editor: Robert P. Holley, Professor Emeritus of Library and Information Science, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, USA aa3805@wayne.edu

This JLA column will consider issues of education and training for management positions in libraries and other information organizations from the perspectives of both the provider and the recipient. The column will appear in odd-numbered issues of the journal and focus on management education/training at various stages of the individual's career including the effectiveness of these efforts, their content, and the specific challenges of teaching and learning within the field of librarianship. The column will address both theoretical and practical concerns. Prospective authors are invited to submit articles for this column to the editor at aa3805@wayne.edu

The Challenges of Teaching the Introductory LIS Management Course

Robert P. Holley

Professor Emeritus of Library and Information Science, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI,
USA aa3805@wayne.edu

Abstract: Teaching the introductory LIS management course may be the most challenging assignment for LIS professors because of the breadth of the subject, the probabilistic nature of management principles, and the differing management environments of LIS organizations. The best teaching strategy is to describe honestly to students the benefits and limitations of the course and to focus on the achievable objectives of introducing students to core management concepts, providing skill enhancement, and encouraging them to evaluate their management potential. The article discusses the difficulties of teaching leadership skills, the limits imposed by student competencies, and the impact of the professor's background on course content.

Keywords: teaching management; student management potential; leadership skills; management readings; uncertainty in management

Teaching the basic library management class may be the most challenging assignment in the library science curriculum. It should be easy, shouldn't it? Every day I get newsletters from sources like LinkedIn that "solve" major management problems in 500 words or less. Searching in Amazon books for the subject term "management" provides over 1,000,000 choices. Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television offer additional advice on this perennial topic. With all these resources, teachers of management should be able to pick and choose to supplement the assigned textbook that itself does a competent job of introducing the key concepts. Unfortunately, it isn't that simple; and the multiple resources often recommend contradictory actions.

The following article gives my thoughts on the subject of teaching management based upon my experiences as a manager coupled with my having taught a LIS management course for twenty-

five years. In keeping with the core principles of what I say below, these experiences, however valid for me, may not be valid for others and shouldn't be taken as the "truth." As I'd recommend to students in a management class, the reader should take away what seems useful and overlook the portions that don't make sense.

The Fundamental Nature of Management

Management deals with people. People are unpredictable. The social sciences may talk about "laws," but these laws are fundamentally different from the laws of science. An object will fall to earth at the same speed with only perhaps slight differences due to atmospheric conditions. Chemical reactions are predictable, once again with possible slight modifications from exterior conditions like temperature. Social science laws, even those supported by careful research, mutate according to place, time, and the people involved and offer no such certainty.

Management, similar to other human activities like counseling, investing, and advertising, deals with probabilities. Science also deals with probabilities, but these probabilities are easier to determine and have a mathematical precision lacking in human behavior. To give an example, a bet in the casino with accurate 200-1 odds will pay off predictably with these odds over a large enough sample. On the other hand, 200-1 odds of a team winning the Super Bowl has no such certainty. Management professors must provide guidance to students but without the relative certainty that students will encounter in courses such as reference, organization of knowledge, or indexing/abstracting. Management professors must convey to students that doing everything "right" may still sometimes result in the "wrong" outcomes and that the concept of the "fog of war" also applies to management since it is impossible to know all the relevant factors in any decision. To counter this bleak outlook, professors should also stress that some strategies have a

much higher probability of success and that calculating these probabilities reasonably well can lead to a much higher chance of a successful management career.

Specific Issues with LIS

Beyond any issues with the discipline's content, the breadth and depth of the subject compounds the intrinsic problems with teaching how to manage. The discussion below assumes that the LIS school offers a core course or a basic elective in management with perhaps another more advanced course rather than a full range of courses, perhaps in cooperation with the Business School, that lead to a joint library science and management degree. The basic course most likely has an extremely short amount of time, perhaps thirty six hours in a physical class or its equivalent in an online version, to deal with this complex topic. Compare this with the College of Business that has a broad range of courses, multiple tracks, and a choice of degrees from the bachelor's to the doctorate. In contrast, the basic LIS management course will at best impart a minimalistic knowledge of the wide range of required skills.

While colleges and universities offer many introductory courses that are able to provide an overview of the subject, management is different. Such a course in world history or literature offers an educationally valuable overview but only at a superficial level; the teacher doesn't expect students to acquire mastery of the discipline. The management course, on the other hand, has the voiced or assumed goal that the student will be able to start managing upon its completion. This course is therefore like the organization of knowledge or collection development course but with a much broader scope and with much more uncertain principles. On a positive note for the future librarian's career, other courses such as those that deal with type of library, research methods, and even subjects such as reference and organization of knowledge

may have a management component that supplements the core course. Technology courses may have elements that deal with IT management whose principles are applicable to general library management.

I see two main content issues in teaching management to a group of students with diverse career goals. The first is the type of library. As indicated above, some schools have type of library courses to deal with specific issues in academic, public, school, and special libraries. The fact that some students want to work in archives, museums, information centers, vendor organizations, consulting, and other areas complicates this picture. In my own institution, school librarians take a specialized management course that allows them to meet Michigan standards for school librarians, and the School is grappling with the fact that many online students don't live in Michigan. On the other hand, archives students at Wayne State University must take the required management course where much of the content has little to do with their future work environment. To complicate matters even more, the various library types have sub-specializations, the most pronounced for special libraries where the student may plan a career in a corporate library, a law office, or a medical or law library within an academic institution, each with a differing management environment.

A second issue is the size of the library. Managing the Library of Congress or the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University is very different from managing a one person library of any type. The student who gets a job at a large library will most likely manage at least a few support staff or student assistants but will not deal with the broad range of tasks that the director of a small library will immediately face. While the duties may be less complex, the small library director must have a basic knowledge of management across the board in order to succeed. Furthermore, most management textbooks for library science focus on structures that are found

only in large libraries such as a person or office for personnel issues and access to legal counsel. The same is true for most professional articles on library management though a small body of readings is available on smaller libraries. (*Library Literature & Information Science Full Text* includes 58 items with the subject heading “Small libraries – Administration” on July 14, 2015.) Overall, teaching resources underestimate the collective number of jobs in small libraries and may not prepare students well for these positions. (Holley, 2015)

What to Teach

The first issue is to decide what to teach. As indicated above, management has such a broad scope that the introductory course cannot hope to cover all potentially useful topics. The strategic choice for assigning student readings is often the determining factor. Choosing a broad range of outside readings gives professors the most flexibility. The challenge sometimes is finding basic enough readings for the knowledge level of the beginning student. The professional literature is most often, as its name indicates, for professionals. Self-contained basic summaries of key concepts are rare so this option creates more work for professors in finding appropriate course materials.

The second and more common option is using a management textbook. Some suggest using a basic introductory textbook for business students. The issue here is that managing a for-profit enterprise is much different in many areas from managing a non-profit library though this choice might make more sense for those students who plan to work in corporate libraries. Some basic texts also exist for non-profit management and would come closer to the library model such as

Nonprofit Management 101: A Complete and Practical Guide for Leaders and Professionals by Darian Rodriguez Heyman.

The most popular choice is to select a general library science management textbook since several library science publishers include such offerings. The main advantage for this choice is that it makes it easy to structure the course. These textbooks also provide suggested outside readings for assigned supplementary coverage or for students who seek more specific guidance about certain subjects or specific management issues in their chosen library type. These readings thus often help solve the issue of varying student career goals. I will discuss the shortcomings of library science management textbooks later in this article.

According to the theoretical perspective that I gave above, content can be divided into three overlapping categories. The first category is where the management subject approaches the certainty of the sciences. The only example that I can think of to put here is a budgeting exercise, but even here the answers will depend upon a prior list of assumptions that mask the uncertainty of accounting practice. In fact, this is one area where the introductory nature of the course favors certainty where an advanced course would include a discussion of how budgeting and accounting are not as settled as most of us think.

My second category includes topics where generally agreed-upon best practices exist. In areas such as grant proposal preparation, performance appraisal content, and business writing, professors can give specific guidelines on how to prepare the documents for increased effectiveness. The same will apply for some management decisions such as selecting computer software and hardware based upon industry standards. Professors can grade assignments with

some objectivity because management experts have established an overall consensus on best practice.

After the hard and semi-hard skills of the first two categories, the soft skills required of a successful library manager present the greatest teaching challenge. These skills include: leadership, charisma, motivation, decisiveness, tenacity, compassion, and others that are the main characteristics that make for a great leader over a competent manager. Very few leaders get fired for writing bad memos, plus their support staff can often correct these weaknesses. As a quick aside, I question the belief that great leaders always succeed; good management and skilled execution are also important. My two historical examples are John Brown, who failed miserably at Harpers Ferry, and the leaders of the Children's Crusade, whose followers were sold into slavery. (Current historians question the historical accuracy of the second event.) The management literature often profoundly disagrees on the substance of these traits and how to acquire them. Some contend that great leaders are born rather than made and that the higher level soft skills are not teachable even if some improvement is possible for most people.

Management professors have to make decisions about teaching these soft skills and for determining their own attitudes that underlie what they teach. Research studies come to conclusions using the probability of success based upon real world behaviors. The best studies are based upon larger samples and follow accepted research principles in the social sciences. The first issue with such studies is the fact that results are probabilities rather than scientific certainties. The second question is whether the sample and its results are applicable to managing library and information science organizations, a factor that will apply to all conclusions discussed in this section. The questions of applicability can include the situation (profit versus non-profit, variations in industry), place (New York, Washington, or Silicon Valley), time (the

validity of any study decreases over time), and the participants (certain personality traits may be statistically more common in various groups). A well-researched case study would also fall into this category but with an increased concern about general applicability, a topic that the authors of such case studies should discuss as part of their research evaluation.

The second category includes collective and individual experiences without efforts to achieve statistical reliability. Even perhaps the most successful example of this category, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey, is based upon his collective experiences rather than any valid sampling techniques. Any individual biography or personal narrative should be even more fundamentally questioned about its general applicability. Should professors tell students that being nasty or dropping out of college are keys to success with Steve Jobs and Bill Gates as their examples? These experiences share the same defect as similar advice about investing—the special circumstances that may have led to the success no longer apply; in effect, the student is getting yesterday's guidance. Other management gurus attribute success to following certain principles when the main factor may be good luck or good timing.

The same applies to those who write management articles without any statistically valid research. (This article belongs in that group.) Such articles often give practical advice that falls within the same category as that from any advice columnist—largely useful but somewhat superficial. I have noted that these articles most often give safe, generalizable guidance and have a bias towards decisiveness and personal organizational skills, two traits that don't work for managers like me who value other attributes.

The concluding issue for this section is the applicability to LIS students of any “lessons” from the various methods above and their ability to implement the suggestions. Even if research

conclusively proves that the key to success in management is an IQ of 170, graduation from an elite Ivy League School, connections with Washington's political elites, and inheriting a \$5 million fortune, these lessons won't be useful to many LIS students. On the other hand, if the results of personality tests given to librarians are accurate, research on how introverts can become successful managers would have much more importance.

How to Teach

The first step is for management professors to examine their own personalities, beliefs about management, and prior experiences with the same lucidity that they would review the sources above. In my own LIS School, the other professor who regularly taught the management course included very different content from a radically dissimilar perspective. But he also taught an excellent course. I respected his viewpoint as a valid possibility. Overall, I believe that full-time professors have an advantage in being able to disassociate themselves better from a narrow perspective to reach a greater number of students. On the other hand, practicing librarians who are adjunct professors have more real world experiences to recount and will be more useful to students in the class with an interest in their type and size of library.

I would openly share the results of this self-analysis with students during the first class period. Only rarely is any one professor successful with all types of students. Making clear early what the professor's goals, teaching styles, and assignments are allows students to withdraw if they believe this class won't meet their needs. Full-time professors should use any available options such as orientation, advising, and the school discussion list to clarify their teaching methodology and special expertise to avoid having students sign up who won't profit from their methodology

though scheduling issues and the lack of sections taught by other professors may limit the effectiveness of this strategy.

Professors should also discover right away what the goals of their students are for the course.

What type and size of library do they wish to work in? Are they interested in non-library positions? Do they have any interest in management? The last question is especially important for those teaching a required course because I have found that many students have the goal of avoiding as much as possible any management responsibilities. While more difficult to determine, knowledge about their learning styles and personality preferences is also important.

Beyond a variety of readings, one way to deal with providing diverse content is to schedule guest lecturers based upon the class interests. For the average course, scheduling after these initial discovery steps is possible for the latter part of the course. In a similar fashion, including guests with differing perspectives from your own is one of the best ways to include content on diverse management styles and implicitly to demonstrate that many roads lead to successful management.

Early on, professors should also deal with the ambiguity of management and the fact that management is not an exact science with guaranteed results. While some management textbooks are better than others, most that I have encountered project an image of guaranteed success by following a prescribed path often given in a concise table. The self-satisfied smugness of a know-it-all textbook underemphasizes the complexities that each student will encounter in their library careers whether as an employee or a manager. Worse, it gives students an overly optimistic view of how easy it is to manage. In my own class, I include a small unit on managers whom I know personally who had major failures through no apparent fault of their own from circumstances beyond their control or from decisions made before they took the position.

Dealing head on with the role that personality plays in management style is also a key lesson to impart. In my first class, I ask students who are willing to do so to complete the Keirsey Temperament Sorter. (Keirsey.com) My first goal is to show students that people see the world differently and that managers are more likely to succeed if they take these differences into account. Secondly, students get feedback on their own personality style and how it might affect their management behaviors. I take great care to emphasize that personality does not determine destiny and that all students can become managers, especially if they are aware of those areas where they must expend extra effort. My final observation is that this test shows that my own personality type is different from that of most library students and that I have to remember this throughout the semester. With great predictability, the majority, and sometimes a very high majority, of students are introverted, intellectual, and quick to make decisions while I share only the middle trait. Another possibility for management professors to achieve this goal is assigning readings on this topic.

Students also have different learning styles so that a good variety of classroom methods and assignments will increase the chances of teaching success. I find particularly useful hands-on activities that include role playing within smaller groups though such exercises do not translate well to online teaching. I start the semester with a group project where the main objective is not the assigned problem but rather the detailed log that I expect students to keep of group interactions. I expect them to reflect upon their own and their colleagues' collaboration styles. Assignments should include practice with hard, middling, and soft skills. I find grading assignments that ask soft skill questions such as what would you do to motivate your staff the hardest to grade because quoting strategies from secondary sources does not guarantee that the student would be able to implement them. Case studies are a valuable tool though I have

discovered that the recent scenarios that I have encountered present problems that are too easily solved. For me, the best case studies present difficult situations where the ultimate best solution is not readily apparent and requires students to consider the issues from multiple perspectives. Case studies invariably miss some facts important for their solution and, many times, have multiple feasible solutions, some of which I had not considered until a student presented them.

Concluding Thoughts

I'm not suggesting, even with the limitations presented above, that LIS programs eliminate the management course. In fact, I would argue that it should be required for all students. Instead, I propose being more honest about the introductory nature of such courses. No claims should be made that this basic course will provide students with the skills needed to be successful managers or provide absolute answers. Overall, a well taught management course is important for introducing students to management concepts, for providing some skill enhancement, and most importantly for encouraging students to evaluate their own management potential. Achieving these goals is sufficient justification for including a management course in the LIS curriculum.

Holley, B. (2015). Op Ed -- Random Ramblings -- Don't Forget about Small Libraries *Against the Grain*, 27(3), 34-35.

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