Organizational Entry: Human Resources Selection and Adaptation in Response to a Complex Labor Pool

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ABSTRACT
ENTRY-LEVEL RECRUITMENT to library organizations is discussed in light of the complex labor pool. Suggestions are provided for better techniques to accommodate both employer and employee goals. The need for clearer articulation of specializations to facilitate targeted preparation of new entrants is presented as a strategy to develop a broader cadre of entry-level personnel.

INTRODUCTION

The complexity of the labor pool comprised of individuals holding an accredited degree in library and information science presents special problems regarding organizational entry. This article examines three topics: (1) the complexity of the labor pool; (2) the scope of organizational entry considerations; and (3) considerations for organizational entry in a library and information environment.

Historically, the *organization* has been the focus of study regarding recruitment of personnel. That is, individuals have been seen in terms of how they will fit into an organization, what skills and abilities they bring, and how they will be trained. Recently, some researchers have begun to consider the process from the dual perspective of the organization and the individual. Wanous (1980, p. 10) has proposed a matching process that considers the needs of human beings and the capacity of organizations to meet those needs. While the traditional view of organizational selection is that an individual's abilities should meet the organization's job requirements—resulting in good job performance—a more expansive view is that the needs of individuals and the organization's

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capacity to reinforce those needs, results in job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. *Needs* represent basic strivings, and *abilities* represent what people can or are able to do. Clearly the individual is concerned with the former and the organization with the latter. The challenge of successful recruitment is to strike a balance between the two.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE LABOR POOL FOR LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE POSITIONS

For simplicity, this discussion considers only first positions. Mid-level and upper-management positions involve different sets of norms and factors relating to occupational culture and require separate analysis. Dailey (1982) has posited that a completely new personnel selection system is required at these levels based upon "track record inquiry." However, since recruitment at higher levels requires a considerably different set of factors (including, but not limited to, institutional comparability, career stage development, and professional affiliation), this discussion will focus on the composition of the labor pool for the first position.

Since most accredited programs of library and information science education grant an "all-purpose" degree, it might be assumed by employers at the outset that the potential labor pool for any entry-level position is fairly homogeneous. However, this is certainly not the case. Most new graduates with mobility target public service in an academic library as their most desirable job (Heim & Moen, 1989). Each program will graduate a few students with clear and specific career goals based, usually, upon preprofessional experience—such as health sciences libraries or music librarianship—but most new graduates will modify career goals in light of constraints on mobility, available positions, and recruitment strategies of potential employers.

The primary fact to keep in mind is that each employer will find a different labor pool for different jobs subject to many variables. A few examples will illustrate this.

—A large urban public library with no library education program in the local metropolitan area will experience difficulty in identifying youth services personnel for an entry-level post.

—A small academic library in a small town will experience little difficulty in attracting candidates for a public services position.

—An urban academic library with library education attainable through part-time or full-time study will find it relatively easy to obtain candidates for most entry-level positions.

—School library positions—in states where the accredited degree is not a requisite for employment—will not be difficult to fill if teacher education programs provide state required courses.

—Large urban libraries—whether academic or public—will experience difficulty in hiring if cost of living is extraordinarily high.

—Suburban communities, in areas where there is no library education program, will experience difficulty in hiring entry-level personnel especially for public library positions.

Far more than we like to admit, mobility plays a great part in the candidate pool for entry-level positions. Because the median age of new graduates is high—mid-thirties—many have already begun families or made commitments to given communities, drastically cutting back the pool of mobile candidates for entry-level positions. Because entry-level salaries are low, relocation is generally based mainly upon an impacted local labor market. A good case in point is this author's experience of recent graduates at Louisiana State University. Until recently, local entry-level salaries were extremely low—$3,000-$4,000 below the national average. Consequently, graduates with mobility tended to relocate. However, recent salary increases in the local job market closer to the national average have tended to keep a larger portion of new graduates in the state—even those from other regions. Whereas a $3,000 to $4,000 differential was impetus to move, a differential of $1,000 to $2,000 was not, given that entry-level positions seldom provide moving expenses—and often do not even provide interview reimbursement.

Additionally, when graduates move they tend to move for positions they perceive (rightly or wrongly) as providing potential for growth and advancement. Thus the public services positions in academic libraries are pursued as these seem to hold promise for careers and development. Positions that candidates view as somewhat static (such as youth services or technical services) do not draw a large and geographically diverse labor pool. A solid example of this would be school library media positions. While an individual may move for such a position, this is generally due to family relocation—*not* due to the candidate perusing openings throughout the nation and then applying. (Compounding this problem is the school systems' own tendency to hire and promote from within and to prefer less experienced candidates due to costs.)

Available Positions

To a large degree, those graduates without clear career goals are rather open-ended as to first job. For those with no mobility, career goals are flexible enough to modify the job search to meet local labor needs. Again, to use the example of Louisiana State University, few matriculated students enter the program with the idea of service in state libraries or state agencies. However, the proximity of state government means that such positions are available and are generally filled by new graduates. Although the state library regularly advertises its positions in the national press, the salaries are not high enough to attract many distance candidates and the labor needs are largely met through hiring nonmobile new graduates.

It seems that students will modify their course of study for the jobs that they perceive as desirable. "Online searching" and "bibliographic

instruction" courses attract students who are targeting public service positions in academic libraries, but few students will enroll in our "management of technical service" seminars. There is a break between students' perceived ideas of positions and their desire to prepare for positions. While those in the public services career stream can take little credit for the fact that many students will modify their studies to meet job requirements, it remains true that this appears to be the only reasonably well understood career stream on the part of most students. This is probably due to the visibility of these positions during undergraduate or other graduate study.

What is needed to generate career orientation toward the requirements of the employing libraries is a profession-wide commitment to delineating career paths for areas of library service in which there is a shortfall of new entrants. While those in library education try to convey the career potential of youth services or technical services, there is not enough provision of role models in the field whose careers have been analyzed to make such specialization attractive. Thus most new graduates will accept these perceived less desirable positions for reasons other than career commitment.

Employer Response to a Complex Labor Pool

Employers who are disappointed at a small candidate pool for new positions may not realize that positions outside of public service require a different recruitment strategy than simply placing an advertisement in the national press. However, once the factors of mobility and accommodation of new entrants to available positions are understood, employers should be able to develop a recruitment plan that enables them to attract a broader selection of applicants. Techniques for managing recruitment in light of a complex labor pool will be discussed in the third section of this article.

THE SCOPE OF ORGANIZATIONAL ENTRY CONSIDERATIONS

Activities Prior to Recruitment

"Organizational entry" refers to those components of the hiring process that surround an individual's recruitment, selection, and socialization. Before any contact is made with candidates for employment, each position—whether newly created or ongoing—should first be subjected to job analysis. Without a complete job analysis prior to selection-related activities, the entire organizational entry process can be jeopardized.

A number of well-developed techniques exist for the conduct of an effective job analysis. These include: (1) *Job Analysis Interviews*—a trained analyst collects data by studying employees familiar with the job under consideration; (2) *Task Analysis Inventories*—questionnaires listing tasks associated with the open position that define the principal

tasks for a given job; (3) *Position Analysis Questionnaires*—standardized evaluation tools that examine work activities and compensation issues; (4) *Guidelines Oriented Job Analysis*—a multistep process designed to develop a selection plan reflecting the job being studied; (5) *the Iowa Merit Employment Systems*—a process designed to lead to content-valid selection devices; (6) *Functional Job Analysis*—a thorough procedure for applying a standardized controlled language for describing and measuring what workers do on a job; and (7) *The Job Element Method* which is designed to identify the characteristics of superior workers on the job (Feild & Gatewood, 1987, pp. 113-22).

In their article, "Matching Talent with the Task," Feild and Gatewood (1987, pp. 122-24) compare these methods of job analysis in light of the *EEOC Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedure* which lay out legal reasons for using job analysis as part of a selection program. They also compare the seven methods on twelve variables: (1) operational currency; (2) degree to which the methodological instruments are directly usable; (3) occupational versatility; (4) standardization; (5) acceptability to users/respondents; (6) required amount of job analyst training; (7) sample size; (8) suitability for content validity; (9) suitability for criterion-related validity; (10) reliability; (11) utility in developing selection measures; and (12) cost.

The need for job analysis is underscored in Isacco and Smith's (1985) assertion that one of the primary reasons that the hiring process fails is due to lack of attention to prerecruitment activities. In their review, they observe that the spectrum of organizational policies relating to personnel should be surveyed frequently to avoid legal problems and to ensure that the job analysis procedure takes place with appropriate attention to position and organizational requirements.

Once the new position is sufficiently clear to those who will be involved in hiring, internal selection procedures should be established. These will vary depending upon the level of position. As noted before, procedures and recruitment for mid or upper-level positions are different enough from entry-level positions to warrant consideration other than that which is the focus of this article.

Stages in Entry
For entry-level professional positions, however, there are special problems associated with the transition from college to work that need to be considered. The model developed by Phillips (1987) is especially helpful.

Phillips's discussion focuses upon organizational entry to professional jobs. Although the model he presents does not differ, on first glance, from traditional models of entry, his focus on those aspects of the process of particular import to new employees who have just completed their professional education has great relevance for this discussion (Phillips, 1987, pp. 35-42). In brief, the stages include:

—*Recruitment:* This is the period in which employers work to ensure a

good match between individuals and jobs. Particular schools may be identified that are known to produce ideal candidates. However, employers should not oversell their organization in such a way that new hires are disappointed upon entering the organization.

—*Pre-employment education:* Given the amount of time between selection and entry, this stage can vary greatly. However, a number of activities that can provide early introduction to the organizational culture can be executed that provide for better transition. These include provision of publications (annual reports, in-house newsletters), direct communications from key people (such as memos that would be routed to the new employees if they were already on the job), or job related documents such as policy manuals.

—*Orientation:* This begins upon arrival to the new position. Well-planned orientations with clear goals and objectives should take advantage of new graduates' enthusiasm. Initial perceptions of colleagues and culture make the strongest impact at this time. Attitudes may be shaped if organizational goals are made clear.

—*Education/training:* These activities are aimed at preparing the new employee to accommodate pre-entry education to actual position requirements. These activities should be organized with the needs of both the individual and organization's in mind.

—*Adaptation:* This is the stage at which an individual through recruitment, pre-employment interaction, orientation, and education/training has adopted the culture of the organization. Performance feedback is crucial to good adaptation.

—*Promotion/assignment:* Many organizations bring in strong new graduates with the intent of placing them where they are best suited once initial stages are completed. It is critical to make the first assignment to positions in which individuals are challenged and well-motivated.

—*Evaluation:* This relates to an overall assessment of the management of the transition and is a mechanism for gauging the effectiveness of the methods employed in earlier stages.

Each stage of the organizational entry process can be configured to meet the requirements of a given organization as well as to the individual position. What needs to be kept in mind at all times, however, is that this is a process that can be managed and must be managed if the organization is to be successful in identifying and retaining excellent employees. The costs of hiring—both actual and in terms of personnel time expended—are so great that organizational entry is the most crucial aspect of human resources management.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL ENTRY IN A LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

How Library and Information Science Entry Differs
How do we superimpose general organizational entry considera-

tions onto the complex labor pool for library and information science positions? First, we need to delineate how this labor pool differs from the general labor pool to which most of the organizational entry literature is directed, and how library organizations differ from other large organizations vis-à-vis their approach to career development.

As described in section one, a very small percentage of new graduates consciously target their graduate education for "a technical services post in a major academic library" or a "youth services position in a suburban public library." Unlike the MBA graduate who prepares generically for a "management position in a large corporation," and looks to the employment market in terms of organizational status and long-term security, the typical MLIS graduate is far more constrained by external factors such as mobility and perceived availability of career development within an organization. While the large corporation accommodates this generic approach through the transition stages outlined in section two—that is taking the best raw talent and reassigning it to posts where skills and organizational needs mesh—library employers recruit for a specific position and thus limit the chances that a new employee will develop innate skills.

Compounding this is the fact that top positions in library and information science are rarely achieved through excellence in one organization. Recent studies have shown that high achievers in academic librarianship exhibit mobility and, in fact, must plan to move several times to different organizations if they are to be appointed to top administrative levels (Anderson, 1985).

This is quite different from other types of organizations that consciously work to develop career ladders within an organization and thus may be more inclined to invest larger amounts of organizational resources in employee education and assignation.

A Functional Approach to Library
and Information Science Entry
    Each individual library administration must certainly develop its own entry process comprised of the components already described. However, the field must take a more concerted stance vis-à-vis some aspects of this process because a given library is not just recruiting for its own needs but for the needs of its entire type of function. Taking this view, which is based upon a more realistic understanding of the potential new-entrant labor pool, there are different explications that might be used to describe some of the stages in Phillips's model. Some of these that consider entry are suggested later—not from a specific library's vantage, but from the vantage of the field as a whole or at least from that of a type of library or function.

Recruitment. This aspect of employment has long been viewed to lesser or greater degrees as a profession-wide responsibility. Recent shortages

for many specializations such as technical processes or youth services have combined to create profession-wide concern (Heim, 1988, pp. 7-9).

This concern has manifested itself in the establishment of recruitment committees within the American Library Association's various sections as well as through ongoing programs of the association's Office for Library Personnel Resources. In response to this concern, the focus of National Library Week in 1989 was the "information professional," with the intent of demonstrating the importance of librarians to information provision as well as the viability of information service as a career.

The "recruitment" process must necessarily include recruitment to the field as well as from the field. Although most employers are looking to fill a specific job opening, they must keep in mind the reasons that the candidate pool may be disappointingly small. Foremost of these reasons include low salaries. New college graduates today are more oriented to economic rewards. If entry-level salaries continue lower than salaries paid to teachers (who require only a baccalaureate degree), it is unlikely that new graduates will choose to enter a masters degree program without better economic incentive. A first step in achieving a larger labor pool is to raise salaries to a level wherein the library and information science profession can compete with other professions. While individual libraries may choose to raise salaries to be competitive for the new mobile graduates, this is a matter of libraries competing against each other and does not address the systemic problem of the field's overall unattractiveness due to low starting pay.

As a library and information science education program dean, this author receives many requests in the course of a year to consider curricular changes. These requests usually come from committees of professional associations. Typically, model programs are proposed for discrete specializations such as map librarianship, media cataloging, or service to the young adolescent. The reason that many specializations cannot receive attention has already been alluded to—few students enter programs with clear career goals. Certainly one reason for the requests to provide curricular exposure to specializations is that the requestors surmise that curricular exposure will lead to career interest. Unfortunately, this remedy cannot be all things to all areas in which shortages are occurring. Students must have a sense of what the specialization for which curricular change is requested can lead to—that is, what are the long-term career options of map librarianship, media cataloging, or service to the young adolescent?

Pre-employment education. The Phillips model views the period between the job offer and organizational entry as a time to begin the socialization to the employing institution. Certainly this holds true for an employing library, but in a broader sense it is time to socialize to the larger profession as well. Given the shortage of new graduates, we have

found that some entrepreneurial employers are visiting campus and making offers very early to excellent candidates. With a longer pre-employment period, the new employee can turn some attention to accommodating the specialization for which they were hired. In three very different cases this year (health sciences, youth services, and public library/technical service) students hired early were supported by their future employer to attend local conferences in the area of specialization. This author also noted that these students are developing papers and independent studies in connection with their future work and, in one case, was taking adjunct courses that will be of use on the job.

Orientation. There are a number of excellent books and articles slated particularly to library orientation for new employees (Dewey, 1987; Creth, 1986). However, these tend, as does Phillips, to focus on organization-specific orientation. Clearly, in very small libraries, there may be no mechanism for internal career development. Obversely, in very large libraries, the mechanism for career development may well be through identification of a job in another similarly sized institution at a different level. Part of the orientation process should be a discussion of career issues that may not directly affect performance in the employing institution.

    Also, given the "isolate" nature of specializations, individuals should be given some sanction to initiate interaction with specialists at other institutions. In a large academic library, the new cataloger assigned to Slavic cataloging should be affirmed in seeking and sustaining contact with Slavic experts at other institutions. In a small public library, the lone youth services specialist should be encouraged to meet on a regular basis with those at other libraries engaged in similar work.

Education/training. Most libraries are unlike large corporations wherein individuals may spend orientation time learning about the organization for an extended period. In libraries, many employees are given only a brief time for institutional orientation and are then expected to assume the responsibilities for which they have been hired. The carefully planned in-house education and training program advocated by Phillips has been formulated and is in place at many libraries (Creth, 1986; Hunt, 1983) but is not usually provided as part of the process of identification of the right person for the right job. Except at the largest libraries, individuals are hired for specific posts. One possible change for organizational entry in libraries—at least larger libraries—might be employment of excellent graduates with no specific job in mind but later job placement once an individual's strengths are assessed. This idea is not new (the Library of Congress Intern Program is a case in point), but broader acceptance of such a practice might be a workable alternative to job specific employment.

    The profession is actually well positioned to foster intra-organizational adaptation through mechanisms such as the American

Library Association's divisions which provide functional or type-of-library career development through annual program meetings, opportunities to serve on committees with like-minded colleagues, and extensive journal publications. However, all of these opportunities are not available to all professionals due to cost or local barriers, and thus the pool of candidates adapted to the larger organizational culture may not be as large as employers would like. This, in turn, causes problems for recruitment to positions at higher levels.

Promotion/assignment. As was noted under the "Education/training" stage, few libraries provide an extended training period at the end of which an individual is assigned a post that best suits their talents and abilities. This may well be an area of human resources management for libraries in which work must be concentrated.

What would be the best situation for employers' seeking to fill library and information positions? Ideally, the field would attract large enough numbers of new entrants that employers would be able to delineate specific career preparations and would thus have a broad field from which to choose. Realistically, the small number of entrants and constraints already outlined, such as low salaries and unfocused position expectations at time of matriculation, means that students are unlikely in the aggregate to identify specific careers at the outset and consciously prepare for them.

So what compromise can be reached? This author suggests that, in the short-run, employers and new entrants connect earlier in the education process—perhaps mid-point—and thus enable some pre-employment preparation to take place. In the long run, when at long last the world values the skills of information professionals to the point that salaries and career ladders are widely available both within and without the organization, we would see increased numbers of graduates and organizational structures that can accommodate their skills and aspirations.

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