
Ethical Considerations Regarding Library Nonprofessionals: Competing Perspectives and Values

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ABSTRACT

THREE MAJOR ISSUES ARE ADDRESSED in this discussion: (1) the role, status, and compensation of such nonprofessionals as library clerks or technicians vis-à-vis professionals, the organization, and the public, particularly in their claims for, or realization of, professional status; (2) the role, authority, status, and compensation of nonlibrarian professionals appointed as directors or supervisors; and (3) the relationship of professional librarians to other professionals on the library or information center staff. After characterizing the nature of a librarian professional, the actual and theoretical criteria for such a designation are discussed. Nonprofessional librarians may argue and strive for such status, but there are many things that should be considered. There are many stakeholders, a variety of ethical principles (e.g., such principles as seeking justice or fairness or preserving professional or organizational trust), a variety of ethical obligations (e.g., obligations to the self, the organization, or society), diverse loyalties (e.g., to the profession or the organization), and varying circumstances and conditions, each of which must be brought into ethical deliberation. For each of the major issues, this article delineates the perspectives, values, obligations, and priorities that stakeholders bring. In such a manner, the complexity and diversity of factors will be made clearer so that resolution, if it can occur in a particular case, can serve the best ideals or seek a working consensus.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is rarely ever a matter of invoking some absolute principle which is unambiguously applied to a particular context and for which there are no competing interpretations or no evocation of diverse and contrary moral demands. In fact, ethics usually entails deliberation: deliberation about which moral principles might apply to a situation, which ones have higher priority, how they might be applied to a given context, and how various stakeholders, even competing roles of each stakeholder, might affect the decision. Applied to the use of nonprofessionals in the context of libraries and information centers, such deliberation is often exacerbated because of the diversity of moral principles that might be brought to bear, the variety of stakeholders and their interpretations of the issues, and the diversity of situations.

There are many issues to be addressed. Who is a professional and, concomitantly, a nonprofessional or paraprofessional? Who are the stakeholders and what is their influence in ethical deliberations? What moral principles, obligations, and values are involved? Are they competitive or harmonious? How can they be applied fruitfully?

CHARACTERIZATION OF A PROFESSIONAL

Admittedly, there is some difficulty with the term “nonprofessional” which has a derogatory flavor, ostensibly devaluing the work of such employees in the library. There are grades of support staff, articulated and recommended in documents of the American Library Association—e.g., clerk, library technical assistant, technical assistant, library associate, and associate specialist—those categories with library in the title having some component of specific library training (in Chernik, 1992, pp. 205-12). These categories are not consistently applied and other terms have been used: support staff, library technicians, information assistants, senior library assistant, library clerk, paraprofessional (Casteleyn, 1990, p. 159; Rodgers, 1997, p. 2). For the purposes of this article, all nonprofessional titles and levels will be clustered under the term “nonprofessional.” Nothing negative is intended by its use. Furthermore, distinctions among library professional grades and levels will also be ignored. While there are differences in skill levels and responsibilities of each nonprofessional and professional staff member, and while there are ethical issues in employee treatment, status, and promotion in each category, the focus of this analysis will be on the ethical issue of the relation of nonprofessionals to professionals, and such distinctions are generally not crucial to this analysis.

Part of the problem is coming to grips with the *designation* of a professional. The issue is not simply a semantic one, but rather the criteria that one invokes to identify professional status frames how one sees the problem of nonprofessionals vis-à-vis professionals and how one addresses such issues as their role, status, claims, and compensation. To complicate

matters, because of the rapid growth of the technological infrastructure of libraries and information centers, there are many kinds of professionals—e.g., not only librarians and information specialists but also computer systems professionals—most of whom do not come from schools of library and information science. Given the size of certain libraries, one may also have accountants or business professionals on staff. How these personnel attain the designation of “professional” may vary considerably.

There are three major areas of ethical concern regarding nonprofessionals in libraries and information services: (1) the role, status, and compensation of such nonprofessionals as library clerks or technicians vis-à-vis professionals, the organization, and the public, particularly in their claims for, or realization of, professional status; (2) the role, authority, status, and compensation of nonlibrarian professionals appointed as directors or supervisors; and (3) the relation of professional librarians to other professionals on the library or information center staff. In order to address the ethical dimensions of these issues, one must determine the way or ways in which a person might be designated a professional and a library and information services professional in particular.

Who is a professional? A professional can be determined by looking at his or her internal disposition (including training, expertise, or abilities) or by external signs. Bommer et al. (1987) argue that: “Fields of activity are properly designated professions only if they are characterized by (a) professional associations, (b) established licensing procedures or (c) both” (p. 270). First of all, in the United States, there are no licensing procedures for librarians or information professionals. In contrast, in the United Kingdom, there are rigorous procedures for becoming a member of an information association—e.g., a fellow of the Library Association or a member of the Institute of Information Scientists. For some associations there are often requirements for nomination of candidates created by existing members of the association.

Unfortunately, such nominations can be either undertaken seriously or may be the result of cronyism, peer or organizational pressure, or indifference. In effect, while a possible determinant of a professional in North America may be belonging to a professional association, such a determination is only an external sign of professionalism. While belonging to professional associations may be characteristic of professionals and, in fact, may facilitate a sense of solidarity among professionals that may be otherwise unachievable (particularly in or among developing countries), it tends to be the *result* of professionalism but not the *cause* of it.

A better approach is to focus on the internal disposition of the person who is avowed to be a professional. By speaking of internal disposition, one must remember that disposition leads to consistent kinds of actions. Following the inspiration of Aristotle’s characterization of a good man, a good professional has a well-formed character that leads to typical

kinds of activities—e.g., competent and courteous service, ongoing education, etc. Furthermore, ethical ideals and professional ideals are *embodied ideals*—i.e., good acts are the kinds of acts that good persons do; professional activities are the kinds of activities that good professionals typically manifest. While there are many activities that information professionals share (e.g., competent work), because there are many kinds of professionals, the model is not going to be singular (e.g., reference librarians, collection developers, and special librarians manifest specific competencies associated with their work).

Michael Bayles (1989) suggests that there are three features that are essential to a profession: (1) extensive training, (2) a significant intellectual component, and (3) a trained ability that puts one in a position to provide an important service to society (pp. 8-9). He also notes that there are other features, but they are not essential—i.e., a professional organization, a process for certification or licensing, monopolistic control of tasks, self-regulation, and autonomy in work (Bayles, 1989, pp. 8-9). These features are similar to the ones found in the Flexner Report, developed by Abraham Flexner, under funding of the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations, which asserted that the following were characteristic of a profession:

a profession possesses and draws on a store of knowledge that is more than ordinary; a profession possesses a theoretical and intellectual knowledge to solve human and social problems; a profession strives to add to and improve its body of knowledge through research; a profession passes on the body of knowledge to novice generations for the most part in a university setting; a profession is imbued with an altruistic spirit. (Metzger, 1975, quoted in Mason et al., 1995, p. 154)

A professional is one who engages in these goals, has acquired extensive training (and presumably education) with a significant intellectual component, which then puts that person in a position of providing an important service to society. No one doubts the value of library and information services to society and, based on that criterion, these services belong to the professions; even a library clerk provides such services. What seems to be more the basis of discrimination between professionals and nonprofessionals is that of being trained with a strong intellectual component. At least in theory, that is a basis for the distinction—i.e., that professionals, already having secured a bachelor's or higher degree in another field, have acquired and mastered the intellectual technologies that form the value-added processes of information work—e.g., classification, cataloging, abstracting, indexing, and accessing appropriate resources. In practice, it appears—at least in North America—to be a matter of having acquired an M.L.S. or higher degree. That is, if one graduates from a school of library and information science which has reason-

able professional standing (this generally means an ALA-accredited institution), such a degree seems to be the major foundation for achieving the status of "professional." In fact, the *ALA Policy Manual* (ALA, 1996) asserts: "The master's degree from a program accredited by the American Library Association is the appropriate professional degree for librarians" (section 54.2). In general, it is probable that an M.L.S. from a good North American school could well serve the foundation of one's professional career, and it is the intention of schools of library and information science to provide such a foundation. There are, however, some problems with this approach. One knows that an M.L.S. degree does not necessarily make a professional—some students manage to pass through library school with minimal vestiges of professionalism, including intellectual rigor, and some have worn the degree of an M.L.S. as if it were a badge of professional privilege without undertaking the requisite professional obligations. Furthermore, what about non-North American schools? Clearly, there are many library schools in the world that provide an equivalent or better training, and there are many, of course, that do not. And there have been hires of graduates of non-ALA-accredited schools into professional positions, just as there has been a lack of recognition of professional status of some non-North American schools.

In a strong but simplistic assertion, Rodgers (1997) avows that the M.L.S. is at best an entrée to on-the-job training where most librarians learn librarianship (p. 10). While it may be true that most librarians undertake to learn a particular practice of librarianship on the job (librarianship proper), presumably they should have more readily adapted to such a practice if they attended a library school of some substance and if they had acquired an adequate understanding of the principles of librarianship or information science—i.e., library and information science per se.

Is librarianship simply about practice? One would think that education should be part of the foundation as well. Part of the education is derived from the degree in another field that most M.L.S. students bring to their programs but, in M.L.S. programs, it also entails such things as learning about the principles of knowledge organization and access, theory, and the value of research, whether undertaking or reading it. Certainly schools of library and information science have tried to develop a level of competence in certain kinds of skills for their graduates, but graduate school education will have failed miserably if it were a matter of simply skill development or training. Of course, there are always two sides to the story—i.e., the intention of the library school curriculum and what graduates take away from such programs. Most, if not all, library schools intend to achieve a balance of education and training. Unfortunately, some students still look at courses as skills acquisition preparatory to on-the-job training or as a ticket to a job.

One of the major concerns in this debate is the tension between applying a simple criterion for professionalism—i.e., having an M.L.S.—and the more difficult qualitative assessment of professionalism—i.e., having the intellectual skills, experience, attitude, aptitude, and educational background. It is the position of this article that it is a trained ability and internal disposition leading to appropriate actions that are the hallmarks of a true professional. Most libraries and information centers, professional associations, and educational institutions would no doubt agree. The problem is the nature and extent of the trained ability and education, and whether the designation of “professional” can be solely operationalized into having acquired an M.L.S. degree. There are many nonprofessionals who are trained in the requisite skills to do certain kinds of intellectual work and have achieved great success—e.g., reference assistants or paraprofessional catalogers (Coleman et al., 1977, pp. 217-19; Bénaud, 1992, pp. 81-92). It is also true that there are many aspects of library work that are routine and nonchallenging, and the requirement of the M.L.S. to do these kinds of jobs appears to be unneeded and, in some instances, because of the wealth of M.L.S. graduates, many have been hired into jobs that do not require the use of an M.L.S. at all. Furthermore, should an advanced degree in another field (M.S. or Ph.D. in M.I.S. or computer science) be ignored in consideration of professional status (all the while recognizing that, in fact, some libraries have hired candidates with degrees in fields other than the M.L.S. into slots advertised for professional librarians)?

On the one hand, because of the increasing use of technologies and increasing varieties of databases and electronic resources that require sophistication in access and use (despite what software developers and vendors lead end-users to believe), there is an increasing need for above-average expertise to provide good information access, and it is not clear that such skills can be acquired on the job. It is also not clear that some library schools are providing all their students with such skills or the intellectual awareness for developing such skills. On the other hand, persons with a B.A. or M.A. in history or other fields may have the aptitude, intellectual capability, discipline, on-the-job learning, and self-education to acquire the requisite skills, knowledge, experience, competence, and perhaps attitude as well. Because of their natural drives, abilities, intellectual curiosity, and resourcefulness, they may come to master the requisite intellectual skills on their own and/or through their job. To refuse such persons the designation of professional does not seem appropriate. Terry Rodgers (1997) in *The Library Paraprofessional: Notes from the Underground* reports on interviews with two nonprofessionals in two different libraries, no doubt in part chosen because they represented two ends of the spectrum. In the first case, there was little recognition, whether in terms of status, respect, or wage (partly the result of a static budget), of a

library clerk whose duties escalated and could conceivably be considered as doing many professional activities; in the second case, the nonprofessional felt that he was given recognition in all these categories, despite the fact that he never sought or attained an M.L.S. (Rodgers, 1997, Appendixes A & B, pp. 307-19).

The criteria for trained ability, education, and intellectual expertise are critical despite the fact that the determination of such status may be difficult and may lie beyond possession of the M.L.S. It is unfortunate that some in library and information work, who hold the M.L.S., do not have the requisite trained ability and intellectual expertise (often as a result of rapid developments, an obsolete degree, and little or no continuing education). Despite the fact that there are many dedicated librarian professionals, there are many women and men who regard librarianship simply as supplementary income, rather than as a profession and who seem to lack the appropriate attitude, commitment, and abilities. Such individuals may believe that if they are helping patrons, no matter how deficient the help may be, they are satisfying the notion of professionalism. For example, many people, including librarians and end-users, can search databases and search for resources on the Internet inefficiently, because efficient searching is a difficult art to master. The problem is that, as Shaver et al. (1985) point out, incompetence in this arena is shielded not only from the patron but from the searcher as well. The difficult dilemma here is having underachieving and undertrained M.L.S. librarians for some library tasks and, conversely, overachieving and self-trained nonprofessionals doing professional work competently, or what could be called the overrating and underrating of library personnel.

Who decides on the designation of "professional" and how is the designation made? Recognition can be internal or external, internal if it is self-recognized and external if it is recognized by others—e.g., society, the organization, professional associations. Internal recognition, while it should not be ignored, is not adequate for, while it may contribute to one's attitude, it may be a mistaken internal judgment. Many nonprofessionals may have an inflated view of the quality of their work or the level of competence required for many library tasks. Of external recognition, the most important is that of the organization's managers, for it is through them that the most obvious benefits—status and compensation—are most immediately and directly conferred, but respect from others in the organization, whether other staff or patrons, and from a professional association, is also important. The "how" of the designation is usually through the job description and corresponding compensation.

It would seem that we need to use other methods to define the professional status of an employee or perhaps to withdraw professional status as well. As noted earlier, in some countries there are licensing procedures

or extensive nomination procedures for membership in professional societies, and these may well be attempts by which member professionals evaluate the fitness of a candidate's disposition, training, and qualifications. Unfortunately, it is not clear that in all countries such criteria are honestly and uniformly applied or that admission into or dismissal from a professional society are adequate techniques. Yet, whether alternative methods come into reality is a serious problem. The issue is not just semantic but ethical as well. Consider two long-standing ethical principles: that each human being deserves respect (including an appropriate recognition of their work) and that each human being deserves justice or fairness. Is it fair to treat a nonprofessional, who does professional work or who has acquired the requisite experience and abilities without an M.L.S., differently from one who has an M.L.S.? Is it fair for a so-called professional who has an M.L.S. but who functions as a mere technician to be considered on the same level with one who has the requisite skills, competence, etc.? Is it not unethical to apply simplistic measures to a designation that has significant economic, social, and political consequences? Is it fair that nonlibrarians are hired as directors of libraries when in many cases their lack of experience of library functions and operations makes them ill-suited as administrators, personnel directors, or public relations officers? Finally, is it fair or just that professional nonlibrarians on library and information service staffs be treated better in terms of status, compensation, and privileges than professional librarians, all the while recognizing that a market-driven economy sets inequities among wages for different classes of employees?

STAKEHOLDERS

There are many stakeholders who argue for a voice in ethical deliberations of the use of nonprofessionals in libraries and information centers: (1) professional librarians and information specialists, however they have managed to achieve their status; (2) nonprofessionals who operate in a variety of roles, from simple clerking to taking on activities that professionals would normally undertake; (3) professionals in the organization who are not librarians or information specialists, but who have other areas of expertise—e.g., systems programmers; (4) the organization's managers and administrators; (5) library boards, advisory groups, or corporate boards; (6) the public or users of information services, whose attitudes towards professionals and nonprofessionals may vary from respectful to abusive; (7) professional organizations at the local, regional, national, or international level; and (8) educational or training institutions that provide appropriate education and/or training.

Some of these stakeholders may undertake a variety of roles reflecting at different moments their various functions in the organization, as members of a professional society, or as persons—supervisor, employee,

member of a professional society. There is a core foundation for all these roles—i.e., the personal self, which embraces or acquiesces to these roles that he or she undertakes in the organization or as a professional. Ideally there should be cohesion among these roles, but in practice there may be conflict—between the ethical demands of a manager (e.g., to promote a lean and efficient organization and to provide materials that suit the interests of most patrons) and those of social responsibility (e.g., to provide materials that will serve the interests of some patrons and may alienate others).

In ethical deliberations about the role and value of nonprofessionals in a library setting, each of these stakeholders has direct or indirect influences, and if a decision-maker plays several roles, he or she may have to prioritize his or her roles or the values that those roles demand. For example, the library administrator qua administrator may have to fire employees, professionals or nonprofessionals alike, because of unfortunate budget cutbacks (e.g., because a library levy did not get passed) yet she realizes that it may be devastating to loyal employees who may also be her friends, and it may destroy the morale of the organization. The values that she is manifesting as an administrator (to maintain a realistic budget for the ongoing survival of an organization) are in opposition to other values that also support the organization (organizational loyalty is shaken with the firing of good employees) and patrons (public trust degrades with declining library services).

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

There are many ways to articulate the common ethical principles that emerge in ethical situations, including those of the use of nonprofessionals in a professional context. In a previous article in the *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, under the influence of Baker (1992) and Rubin (1991), there was articulated a set of principles which can be usefully applied here. This set does not pretend to be exhaustive, and these principles are not mutually exclusive.

1. Respect the autonomy of the self and others. This principle flows from and reinforces the belief in the moral autonomy and dignity of human beings, perhaps most effectively articulated by Immanuel Kant (1959) in his categorical imperative: one must treat human beings as ends and never merely means. Most major social and political documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), support this view. According to Michael Bayles (1989), there are a set of values that should be accorded all human beings, foundational for all professions, based on the value and dignity of human beings—freedom and self-determination, protection from injury, equality of opportunity, privacy, and minimal well-being (pp. 6-7). To this list should be added:

- recognition of a human being's labor, whether intellectual, social, or economic.
2. Seek justice or fairness. This principle validates another principle of the moral worth of human beings—i.e., that if one respects persons, then as a consequence one would seek to be just or fair to them. The principle is obviously general, and there may be a variety of ways in which justice may be realized in a given context. In fact, different stakeholders frequently have widely varying views of what is most just for a particular ethical problem or issue.
 3. Seek social harmony. This principle tries to uphold the good aspects and motivation of the utilitarianism—i.e., that any action should seek to maximize the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Such a principle supports factors of social utility—e.g., that library services should benefit the greatest number of patrons.
 4. Act in such a way that the amount of harm is minimized. In many situations, harm does occur—e.g., when funding declines, cuts have to be made in the organization that may cause lack of pay raises or layoffs. This principle is necessary because it argues for an inverse articulation of utilitarianism. Rather than to promote or maximize the happiness for everyone, one must “do no harm” or minimize the amount of unhappiness. It may voice some of the issues articulated by feminists like Carol Gilligan (1982) who argue that women's moral development is different than men's, and that the unique voice that women add to ethical deliberation is to promote an “ethic of care” as opposed to an “ethic of rights” (the traditional and typical masculine perspective). In an ethic of care, existing relationships are cherished and the amount of harm to existing stable structures should be minimized. So, for example, in the case of static budgets, an administrator might typically cut back on new book purchases rather than firing employees, for there may be less harm by following the first action.
 5. Be faithful to organizational, professional, and public trust. As part of professional commitments, professionals enjoy the trust of different aspects of their roles (e.g., public servant, employee, or professional), and it is part of their role to sustain these trusts. Such faithfulness manifests itself in being and staying competent; avoiding conflicts of interest; safeguarding clients' and source privacy and confidentiality and intellectual property; and avoiding bias in selection policies (Froehlich, 1992, pp. 304-06).

Many of these principles find manifestations in codes of ethics, such as the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association (1995), the Professional Guidelines of the American Society for Information Science, or the Library Bill of Rights (1980). It should be obvious that there are

tensions among these principles and that, depending on the ethical context, different ones may take precedence or priority. For example, in order to promote social harmony or utility, a collection developer may well order only those books that are of interest to the majority of patrons in his or her library. On the other hand, in order to be just and to respect the dignity of a wide variety of human beings that may frequent the library, such a developer must also order works that are representative of a wide variety of viewpoints that may in fact be unpopular with the majority of patrons in a library—e.g., books supporting the acceptance of homosexuality. Thus, a library employee may on different occasions embrace different ethical principles, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to prescribe a particular rule whereby one principle should always supercede another. While it may be true that concerns for justice must be addressed in most ethical situations, it is doubtful to say that such concerns should always supercede interests of social harmony or organizational trust.

TYPES OF OBLIGATIONS

These principles are most often manifested in ethical values and obligations consequent to one's personal, organizational, or environmental roles or interactions, often as push-pull influences derived from personal values and/or one's role in an organization or society. Obligations are values that have some force due to contract, promise, duty, or long-standing custom. Obligations can be grouped in the following manner: (1) obligations to oneself, (2) organizational obligations (obligations to the organization itself and obligations of employers to employees and vice versa), and (3) environmental obligations, environment here referring to the context of ethical decisions in which particular factors emerge based on the problem under consideration. For example, patrons raise ethical concerns when their behavior causes problems for other patrons or library staff (see Froehlich, 1997, pp. 14-24). Such considerations do not arise until a problem emerges—e.g., a homeless person comes to the library looking for a place to sleep. Environmental obligations include obligations to clients (e.g., competent service), obligations to systems (which are indirect obligations to clients in that systems should be improved and defects in such systems eliminated, so that client service continues to strive for high quality), obligations to third parties (e.g., fair dealings with vendors), obligations to the profession (e.g., establishing and adhering to high professional standards), obligations to library boards or governing bodies, obligations to community or cultural standards (e.g., the issue of selection versus censorship indicates the tension between community standards and professional and societal obligations), and obligations to society at large (social responsibility—e.g., in supporting the rights of all individuals and organizations, regardless of their political correctness).

In the context of the discussion at hand, the first two kinds of obligations have the most weight. While on one level it may appear odd to speak of obligations to oneself, there are several. One has an obligation to preserve one's life, to adequately care for one's family and, in the context of organizational or professional life, to have an opinion that may run contrary to a view that she or he might uphold as a supervisor. Awkward as it may be, sometimes one may hold a position as manager or administrator with which one may professionally or personally disagree, and for which one has a right, perhaps even an obligation, to voice. One can argue, in respect to the first principle discussed earlier, that one has the obligation to demand recognition for the quality of one's work.

ORGANIZATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

There are many kinds of organizational obligations. Given the context of most libraries and information services, most libraries serve a value of social utility that is part of their organizational goals. For example, the function of a public library is to provide materials for the recreational, educational, cultural, or informational well-being of its patrons. When books and other materials are acquired for these objectives, such acquisitions are serving goals of social utility. It is also true that one of the main functions of organizational goals, at least for those organizations that are serving worthwhile social ends and that are not dysfunctional, is to continue to exist—i.e., organizational survival. In order to achieve such a goal, administrators seek sound budgets, may curtail employee criticism, may circumscribe employee raises, and hope to promote patron satisfaction, among other things. Organizational obligations are two-way: employees have obligations to employers and employers have obligations to employees. In general, the employee owes the employer loyalty, competence, diligence, honesty, candor, and discretion. Employers need to be truthful in their communications with employees (Bayles 1989, pp. 137-41), and must engage in fair practices—e.g., when advertising a position and keeping promises made during the interview (Rubin, 1991, p. 11).

Employers should not only provide complete and honest communication on job-related matters, but they should respect employee privacy, provide equality of opportunity in hiring practices, and provide appropriate recognition of an employee's work, either through compensation, status, or perks such as supporting travel expenses to professional functions. Furthermore, if they respect the moral autonomy of their employees, they should maximize employees' freedom to execute their job (within the constraints of their job description). One difficult area is the degree to which employees may engage in criticism of the organization. Organizations, if they are to improve and mature, must accept a level of criticism in order to facilitate their goals of social utility. Yet, if the criticism is aired in

public, particularly if it is destructive, in the interests of organizational survival, the organization may discipline the criticizing employees, even fire them.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

There are many environmental factors that influence ethical deliberation, but another one that figures in the issues raised here is that of social responsibility, a factor that is difficult to define but which nonetheless affects moral deliberation. As social institutions, libraries and information centers participate not only in organizational goals, but in the broader goals of society whose greater good they also promote. For example, when a library provides materials that suit the interest of its patrons, they are embracing goals of social utility. When it develops literacy programs, it is investing in goals of social responsibility because such programs are generally not part of its direct mandate. Before the passage of the People with Disabilities Act, the insistence of library building programs to include access for disabled people would have been a matter of social responsibility. The impact of social responsibility may be felt as an anonymous cultural force (e.g., in the moral conscience that a librarian might feel in appropriately not accepting unsolicited library materials promoting neo-Nazism) or in the force of persons or agencies (e.g., recommendations of parents or a religious organization) to include or exclude certain materials in the library.

Different agencies can embrace goals of social responsibility: individual employees, the organization, or the professional association. For example, a professional association may support full access of children to library materials or nonrestrictive policies of Internet use in libraries. The problem is that often these associations voice an opinion that may not find complete adherence among its membership or the organizations in which their members serve. In terms of the issues of professionals and nonprofessionals, a sense of social responsibility in administrators or professional societies may be articulated as a need for adequate wages or for recognition for nonprofessionals or the need for a national skill certification program for library/media support staff.

IDEAL ETHICS AND WORKPLACE ETHICS

For the most part, this discussion has been confined to what might be termed as ideal ethics—i.e., if one acted as a purely rational agent and there were no constraints arising from the environment, this is the kind of ethics an ideal professional would embrace. Practitioners may denigrate such ideal ethics, treating it as “theoretical,” “academic,” or “pure.” In fact, such ideal ethics—ethics which articulate ideals, whether delineated by academic philosophers, theoreticians, or practitioners—are quite enlightening about the nature of ethical values, their diversity or priority,

and the context and nature of ethical deliberation. However, there are influences that affect individuals from acting ideally or fully rationally. For example, various loyalties affect ethical deliberation—e.g., allegiances to persons, administrators, one's organization, or one's profession. They may very well have an ethical base—e.g., loyalty to one's organization facilitates its efficiency and effectiveness, and it is one way in which employees can thank organizations for having a job. On the other hand, such loyalties may blind people to other critical perspectives or other values—e.g., organizational loyalty may be in opposition with the recommendations of a professional association for appropriate compensation for employee levels in an organization. Loyalty to one's family may take precedence over certain forms of unethical behavior in the workplace, because of the importance an employee may place on economic survival when jobs are scarce. Furthermore, there is a predisposition among information professionals (and nonprofessionals, as well) in information organizations, in contrast to doctors and lawyers, to place organizational loyalty above professional loyalty (White, 1991, p. 59), and such tendencies can bias ethical deliberation.

Martha Montague Smith (1994) has noted that different levels of ethics may exist in an organization, depending on the context and its level of dysfunction. In her view, these levels of ethics correspond to Maslow's hierarchy of needs in *Motivation and Personality*—ideal ethics, acceptable work ethic, pressure ethics, subversive ethics, and survival ethics (pp. 158-59). Our analysis has focused on the top level ideal ethics, for which the ideal information professional or nonprofessional should strive and that the professional or organizational ideals should articulate. However, in real organizational life, one may engage in an acceptable work ethic. This is not an ethic that one *should* do, but a descriptive ethic that employees in fact may be doing. In the mode of an acceptable work ethic, the employee may follow professional or organizational and ethical conduct for the most part but may engage in practices that may not strictly be ethical—e.g., making copies of curriculum vitae while looking for other jobs, copying software for personal use, etc. In the mode of pressure ethics, one's job may be threatened if certain unacceptable behavior is not followed—e.g., a professional librarian with significant power in the library asks a nonprofessional to cover his or her duties. In the mode of subversive ethics, the threat to one's job is serious, and political gamesmanship has taken hold of the organization; in this case, one may be tempted to withhold critical information from management to protect one's own job or that of a colleague. In survival ethics, the employee does whatever is required either to maintain his or her position or to use his or her current position to find another one. Because these levels may exist in different organizations, it does not mean that the ethical ideals are no longer goals, but rather the people, based on a variety of circumstances,

may feel the need to compromise their behavior, even if they realize that it is unethical. Such compromises do not justify unethical activity and do not invalidate ideals, but they do indicate the complexity and diversity of many ethical situations.

ETHICAL DELIBERATION AND CORE AREAS OF CONFLICT

Given the framework discussed earlier, three major areas of conflict can be analyzed: (1) the undervaluation of nonprofessionals (from the perspective of library technicians and associates); (2) the overvaluation of nonprofessional administrators or supervisors (from the perspective of information professionals); and (3) inequities among different kinds of professionals. Each of these issues can be explored from the perspective of major stakeholders and the priority or value they may place on different ethical principles. There is no intention here to come to a resolution of any specific problem or to assert any absolute ethical principle or priority of principles. A resolution, when it exists, will be the result of deliberations of decision-makers, typically of administrators, who should consider the various stakeholders and their values, obligations, and loyalties when dealing with a specific situation with specific circumstances and conditions. At least this should be the case in ideal circumstances. In less enlightened circumstances, power politics or one of the modes of workplace ethics may prevail. The resolutions, whatever they turn out to be, could be unethical if decision-makers ignore or override important ethical demands or acquiesce to the influence of particular stakeholders in opposition to acknowledging diverse demands.

Part of the temptation of the decision-maker is selective scanning and weighing of factors, principles, loyalties, etc.—i.e., based on a prior decision, however covert or unconscious, the decision-maker selects and weighs, and perhaps only even perceives, those factors alone which support his decision, ignoring other claims and circumstances. In order to confront such tendencies and to arrive at a more just decision, the philosopher John Rawls (1958) developed a technique called the “veil of ignorance,” which is useful in this context. When a decision-maker is about to embark on a decision, she must put on a veil of ignorance, such that the decision-maker in dialogue with the other stakeholders in a particular decision will not know after the decision what position she will hold and how she will be affected by the decision. That is, in this thought experiment, she will not know whether she will be an administrator, a professional librarian, a staff member, a nonprofessional library associate, or a systems professional. In such a manner, the decision-maker will be more sensitive to the concerns of each stakeholder given that they will not know what circumstances they will occupy after the decision, and she will seek a solution that will strive to be just to each stakeholder.

Whether decision makers will use such techniques remains to be seen. It is hoped that they will. While one cannot control the process of the decision maker, one can at least indicate the variety of concerns and interests of the various stakeholder. The intention here is to lay forth the variety of ethical principles that come into play and how different stakeholders or different roles of stakeholders may value, prioritize, or apply such principles or how they might manifest their obligations. With this framework, decision-makers will, it is hoped, pursue a more enlightened approach to their decision-making.

THE UNDERVALUATION OF LIBRARY NONPROFESSIONALS

For this issue, the policies and decisions of administrators have the greatest impact, but both ethical principles and the interests and claims of different stakeholders should be considered. The two most obvious principles that would come into play would be respect for human beings, in this case nonprofessionals (with the concomitant values of freedom and self-determination, protection from injury, respect for privacy, equality of opportunity, privacy, minimal well-being, and recognition of their work) and the need for justice. Nonprofessionals would see their handling by administrators, professional staff, and the public as unjust or unfair in any number of ways—e.g., performing nonprofessional or professional work without sufficient recognition, whether in terms of compensation, status, or perks, failure to have the opportunity to move toward professional status, when experience, self-education, or training may warrant it. Furthermore, they may believe that they are realizing not only obligations to themselves, but also organizational obligations, by promoting a workplace where work is properly rewarded and where overly restrictive barriers to professional status are challenged. They may argue that social responsibility, fairness, and human dignity insist that employers provide a decent wage (where pay scales are unacceptably low). If working conditions are incredibly poor, nonprofessionals may engage in pressure ethics, survival ethics, or subversive ethics. They may also argue that they are undervalued by the public as well as by professional staff. All of the above would facilitate organizational disharmony and lack of organizational trust.

Professional librarians and information specialists would also demand respect for themselves as human beings, employees, and professionals. If nonprofessionals were granted easy access to professional roles or activities or to professional status, the value and significance of professionals' talents, education, background, and expertise would decline, and an unjust situation would exist—e.g., equivalent status and recognition for nonequivalent education and training. They may see it also as a breach of their original contracts (creating organizational disharmony) in that the promises by the employer at the original hire would at best be compromised. While they realize that many library tasks could be accomplished

by nonprofessionals, being a professional does not mean that professional activities are exercised all the time in the same way that a doctor is not always examining patients. Furthermore, many other tasks require a level of expertise (e.g., cataloging, some reference work, and online searching) that is not a matter of mere on-the-job training but of an understanding of principles of knowledge organization and access and a background understanding of the subject matter under consideration. To reduce such tasks to their lowest common denominator not only devalues such work, but information work in general, as something "anybody can do." In such a manner, respect for the profession also declines. Professionals would also argue that the decline in the quality of services, consequent to nonprofessionals assuming professional activities, would also represent a betrayal of organizational trust (in its failing to realize its organizational objectives) and public trust because, while the organization may run more lean, its effectiveness and efficiency would be impaired. They may also point out that nonprofessionals' assessment of professional activities—whether theirs or professional employees—may be inaccurate, and to not question nonprofessionals' self-assessment in this regard destroys any real sense of professional standards and competence.

Another set of stakeholders in the organization, nonlibrarian professionals (such as systems experts) may also embrace similar views to those of information professionals, given that their work also entails a special kind of expertise. For example, systems maintenance could lead to disaster in the hands of nonprofessionals. However, if they have the tunnel vision typical of many technicians and engineers, they may undervalue the peculiar expertise associated with professional library and information center work.

Library boards or governing advisory groups frequently set policy for an organization, which the directors and managers implement. Depending on particular circumstances or levels of dysfunction, the level of direct control by governing bodies may vary. In general, the interests of the governing bodies are represented in managers and administrators, and their ethical concerns will be much the same as those of managers. However, the realization of objectives may be seen differently by the board or board members than those who are charged to realize them. If there is large-scale conflict, the director or administrators may be fired. The board in general would tend to emphasize ethical ideals of social utility—i.e., that the function of the library is to serve the educational, recreational, or cultural interests of its patrons—and they may be mindful of the community pressures for covert censorship. Of course, depending on its composition, the board may well promote policies of social responsibility through a collection policy that emphasizes diversity, thereby taking a broader view of justice or fairness. Library directors find themselves in difficult circumstances if they receive mixed messages from the

board or if they regard the board's approach as too conservative or parochial, and these difficulties would invade considerations of nonprofessionals in the library.

The public tends to want similar ethical objectives as board members or directors—a lean, efficient, and effective organization which would be translated for them in such dimensions as: maximized use of tax money; courteous, prompt, and competent service; and organized, accessible, and useful collections of materials. While they are interested in competent service, they may be unable to distinguish professional help from nonprofessional help, particularly when help may not entail any extensive professional activities. This failure to discriminate does not help to support the cause of professionals, particularly when arguments are made for additional professional staff.

Professional associations would support the interests and arguments of information professionals. In addition, they would want to control access to the profession in rigorous ways so as to preserve its identity and to ensure its status and social role. They would see the overvaluation of nonprofessionals as unjust, not only to the profession, but also to its members, the public, and organizations that employ their members. If alternate means were to be developed for nonprofessionals to acquire professional status, they would demand control of them, just as associations for library technical assistants or library associates would want to control the certification of nonprofessionals with no training in library skills (see Position Paper on Skill Certification for Library/Media Support Staff, Council of Library/Media Technicians [COLT], 1997).

Given that the major route to professional status is through the M.L.S., the survival of schools of library and information science would be threatened if easy and many routes were developed for persons, particularly nonprofessionals, to achieve professional status in ways other than the M.L.S. They would emphasize the same arguments made by professionals and professional associations: the quality of professional work and the need for appropriate background and educational experience set the basis of conferral of professional status.

In most cases, directors and managers are the principal decision-makers enacting the demands of a board of directors or governing body, and trying to balance the demands of all the stakeholders: employees (professionals or nonprofessionals), the public (including taxpayer nonpatrons), the organization as a whole, and professional associations. Because of competing demands by diverse parties with the general responsibility of promoting an efficient and effective organization, nonprofessionals have the most difficulties in ethical deliberation and realization. In order to achieve such an objective, they must balance all the ethical principles: respect for patrons, employees, the governing board, and the general public, whatever their status; justice or fairness for each

employee and the organization as a whole; promotion of organizational harmony; prevention of organizational disharmony; and preservation of public, professional, and organizational trust, by providing useful and competent information services. By enacting a budget that maximizes output and minimizes expenditures, they attempt to fulfill the demands of organizational utility and survival and to serve the public interest. Consequently, they may try to hire many nonprofessionals at a minimum wage and strive to have them take on as many roles as possible so as to minimize the hiring of professional employees. Yet, trying to "do no harm," and preserving professional trust and honoring professional employees, they may see trouble from the professional associations and educators/trainers for trying to install procedures that would easily secure professional activities or status for employees originally hired as nonprofessional. They may attempt to minimize the amount of harm to an organization and all its employees and preserve social harmony by foreseeing that organizational morale might degrade, especially in terms of professional employees, if easy transitions were possible from nonprofessional to professional status.

If directors and managers were operating in a fully rational mode and if they put on the veil of ignorance, they would attempt to balance the interests of all stakeholders, while minding their obligations to the organization, the public, and the governing board and striving to prioritize and fulfill diverse ethical principles. In real situations, priority may be placed on certain obligations, based upon the influence of some stakeholders or the perceptions of the decision-maker on how they weigh their obligations and loyalties.

THE OVERVALUATION OF NONPROFESSIONAL ADMINISTRATORS OR SUPERVISORS

A second major area of concern is the over-evaluation of nonlibrarians (from the perspective of professionals) hired as administrators or directors. From the viewpoint of the governing board, such hires bring prestige to the organization and may encourage increased funding, patronage, and visibility. They would be concerned about organizational efficiency and effectiveness and the impact such a hire would have on the organization, hoping the benefits would more than offset the potential drawbacks.

However, library professionals bring many ethical concerns to such hires, for example, about public, professional, and organizational trust, and the real realization of organizational objectives and harmony and avoidance of disharmony. While a well-known person might bring prestige to a library or information center, and thereby possibly gain some public trust and improve public relations, at the same time, professionals worry that their lack of understanding of library operations and manage-

ment may lead them to poor decisions regarding the library's management and realization of its primary goals. Nonlibrarian directors or supervisors, while they could be made sensitive to library issues, tend to have the lowest level of knowledge of a library's operations and often base their decisions on a grossly inaccurate image of the library (Drake, 1990, p. 152). It also devalues the profession because it may imply that professionals are not good enough to run prestigious libraries. Consequently, such a hire may degrade organizational loyalty and morale and may ultimately lead to public distrust.

In addition to these considerations, other stakeholders—nonprofessionals, whether nonlibrarian professionals or library associates—would be concerned whether the hired person was an effective administrator—trustworthy in communication, equitable in personnel practices, effective in organizational leadership. Depending on the position of the hire, other managers and supervisors would share the same concerns, perhaps adding a factor that in-house personnel were being passed over for important positions, thereby raising more issues about organizational trust and loyalty. In general, the public would appreciate the prestige that a particular person may bring to a library as a director, but they would still be concerned about organizational efficiency and effectiveness and the ongoing maintenance and improvement of library services.

Professional associations and corresponding schools of library and information science would endorse the viewpoints of professionals, being especially concerned with the possible devaluation of professionals, the profession, and the professional society.

Professionals, nonprofessionals, the governing board, and the public should respect the dignity of the hired nonprofessional supervisors—i.e., give them freedom and autonomy and be fair to them by allowing them to adapt to the position—before they engage in extensive criticism in their direction. In cases such as this, the decision-maker(s) may be the governing body, and it is to this body that the variety of ethical viewpoints and concerns should be placed under consideration by the various stakeholders.

The decision-makers in this scenario—most likely the board of trustees or other governing body—may place emphasis on the social utility principle—that an ethical objective of an organization is to promote social harmony, in this case arguing that such hires will promote the overall goals of the organization in the long run. Unfortunately, they may undervalue principles on which library professionals are likely to place priority—seeking justice or fairness (their concern being that such actions are unfair to in-house candidates, library professionals, and the library profession). Also professionals may claim that such a practice may do harm to the organization and may betray public and professional trust. Such divergent appeals to the priority of different ethical principles by differ-

ent stakeholders are characteristic of many ethical situations and heighten the difficulty of easy resolution of such situations.

INEQUITIES AMONG DIFFERENT KINDS OF PROFESSIONALS

The final area of concern is that of the use of other professionals in the library, particularly when they command better recognition, compensation, perks, or quick promotions. Librarian professionals may feel inadequately compensated or recognized where there are large pay differences between them and other kinds of professionals. Such differences may lead to poor organizational morale, organizational tensions, and other concerns. Nonprofessional librarian technicians or associates may support professional librarians in this regard hoping to promote better equity in the workplace, especially if they have aspirations for professional status or promotions.

Administrators or managers and board members, while wanting to maximize their budget and organization efficiency, may feel coerced by marketplace pressures, realizing that, in a market-driven economy, salaries are often set by market demand. Highly technical positions in general are often better paying. Administrators may wish to be as equitable as possible and to promote organizational harmony by minimizing differences in compensation, status, perks, and promotions.

Naturally, nonlibrarian professionals themselves would emphasize equity issues based on the marketplace, arguing that professionals should be compensated in comparison with others in the same line of work and at the same level of experience.

The public may originally undervalue the technical expertise brought to libraries by nonlibrarian and librarian professionals, although the pizzazz—e.g., Internet access—offered by technological glitz may ameliorate their concerns about the increased pay ranges for systems professionals. In the long run, they would assess the long-range effectiveness and efficiency of the library. Library-related professional associations and educators would underwrite the values of information professionals, while professional associations and educators of nonlibrarian professionals would support their constituents.

The decision-makers, typically managers and administrators, again find themselves trying to balance various ethical principles, loyalties, and obligations, and in this case attempting to appropriately value more expensive employees without sacrificing the loyalties of other employees and equitable consideration of them. In fact, they undoubtedly would prefer a just resolution to this problematic situation, but two forms of justice seem to compete here—local justice and economic justice. From the perspective of local employees, pay scales should be comparable for different kinds of professionals. From the perspective of macroeconomics, salaries

must be allocated based on marketplace demand. A compromise may drive the underpaid professionals to other positions.

CONCLUSION

Ethics entails deliberation. There are a variety of values, principles, loyalties, and obligations that each stakeholder, and the roles they may undertake, brings to a deliberation or hope to bring for consideration of decision-makers. There are a set of circumstances and conditions that shape a particular context that frame or constrain a particular issue, such as the use of nonprofessionals in a particular library or information center. In the best of circumstances, each stakeholder voices his or her views, and they strive to appreciate each other's views, maintain the best ideals, and come to a consensus (if appropriate to the context), realizing that people in good faith can often hold contrary views on one particular matter, or that ethical goals, such as organizational effectiveness, can be realized in a variety of ways. Otherwise, the primary decision makers weigh the views of all concerned and seek to find the optimum solution based on weighing and prioritizing ethical principles. In worse circumstances, it is hoped that ethical ideals are still upheld or maintained, despite a faulty realization of them or despite resolutions that do significant disservice to some stakeholders. Each stakeholder has legitimate ethical claims, and the decision-maker would do well to recognize such claims and to strive for a solution that upholds ethical principles and balances stakeholder interests. What this discussion has tried to do is to delineate the variety of ethical principles and interests that come into play. In this respect, it may aggravate the process of deliberation by forcing awareness of the plurality and contrariety of moral principles that may come into play as well as the variety of factors, loyalties, and interests. It is hoped that such awareness will lead to more just and more creative solutions to issues herein analyzed.

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