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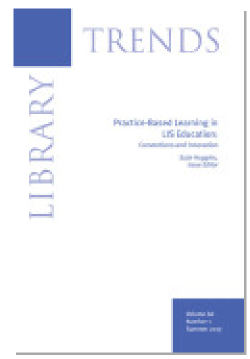

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Library Trends, Volume 66, Number 1, Summer 2017, pp. 66-90 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2017.0029

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When Practitioners Get It "Wrong": The Largely Underanalyzed Failures of Professional Tacit Knowledge

Bill Crowley

Abstract

This essay describes how valuable tacit knowledge (personal knowledge) becomes explicit knowledge (recorded knowledge) and vice versa. It ascribes considerable responsibility for practitioner ignorance of community and organizational realities to American Library Association programs that lack required courses in marketing and advocacy, Finally, it describes how tacit knowledge becomes a basis for determining stakeholder needs and establishing the relationships necessary to develop relevant service programs and funding.

A History of Library and Information Marginalization

In numerous contemporary library and information circles, the inability to develop a professional tacit knowledge equal to identifying and addressing organizational or community fiscal and service realities has left libraries and information centers vulnerable to minimization or even elimination. Tacit knowledge has copious definitions but can be understood as more or less "the undocumented or marginally documented procedures used by expert practitioners" (Crowley 2014, 38). Unfortunately, actions based on erroneous tacit knowledge can have negative consequences. It is an understudied reality that recent financial and other crises have underscored critical lapses in the tacit knowledge underlying the formal education, continuing education, and work practices of librarian and information professionals. Failures in acquiring and using the tacit knowledge of marketing and advocacy have too often resulted in adverse perceptions by decision makers. Several examples can serve to illustrate the funding and personnel problems that result when ineffective connections with those who control resources result in discernments of little or no value in

LIBRARY TRENDS, Vol. 66, No. 1, 2017 ("Practice-Based Learning in LIS Education: Conventions and Innovation," edited by Sujin Huggins), pp. 66–90. © 2017 The Board of Trustees, University of Illinois

the worth of library and information professionals and their agendas for service.

First, on the international level, severe reductions in funding in Britain, Canada, and the United States during and after the Great Recession of 2007 demonstrate the perceptions of many decision makers that libraries and information centers are disposable amenities, far from being essential necessities in corporate, community, school, and higher education contexts (Crowley 2012; *Public Libraries News* 2017).

Second, from the national perspective of a division head of the American Library Association (ALA), Carolyn A. Anthony (2014, 1), in the May/June issue of *Public Libraries,* recounted

> Recently I received an email message from a fellow library director recommending a librarian for employment. She noted that the librarian was skilled in readers' advisory and a good team member, but had been let go due to continuing cuts to the public library's budget by the municipal authorities, despite the fact that the town is sufficiently affluent to afford sustained support for public library services. *Unfortunately, the local officials do not see the extent of the public library's contribution to the well-being of community residents and to the town.* (italics added)

Third is a local commentary by Linda Neyer (2014, 109), who was involved in a successful effort to retain the position held by a retiring high school librarian with the Bloomsburg [Pennsylvania] Area School District (BASD). In this example, the school district's "administration perceived that the librarian essentially ran a 'study hall' and reasoned that an aide could do the same thing at less pay." After testimony was heard at a school board meeting in support of the positive value of retaining the district's high school librarian position, a counterargument was made by the assistant principal that a library aide under the supervision of a classroom teacher was sufficient to do the previous librarian's job.

The fourth and final recounting, by a national library leader relating her own professional experience, was contained in the September/October 2016 issue (p. 6) of *American Libraries.* Writing as President of the American Library Association, Julie B. Todaro, employed as the Dean of Library Services at Austin (Texas) Community College, described

- years of hearing people say, "Do you have to have training to do this job?" and "I'd love to have your job—I would love to read all day!";
- a request to babysit a child while a student went to class;
- institutional leaders responding to reduced revenue by cutting library staff and replacing them with volunteers or demanding continuing high levels of service despite their imposed library funding reductions; and
- in previous employment, encountering pressure to carry out substantial cutbacks while simultaneously hiding the shortfall from stakeholders in order to prevent those who actually controlled the budget from being pestered by public complaints.

The recent library, information, knowledge, and archival literatures are filled with such examples of how negative—often factually erroneous—perceptions of low value for the services of library and information practitioners have led to reduced funding and elimination or deprofessionalization of librarian or information positions.

Many readers are doubtless familiar with such ceremonial descriptions by university presidents of variations of the academic library as the beloved "heart of the university" (Oakleaf, ACRL, and ALA 2010, 3). Similarly, city mayors have long lauded the public library as the valued "people's university" (Molz, 1964) or "street corner university" (Broady-Preston and Cox 2000). However, numerous in-depth analyses, such as that of the *Huffington Post* ("Library Budget Cuts" 2016) or the National Education Association (Rosales 2016), reveal an undervaluation of libraries and information centers at the critical financial and personnel levels. For more extensive compilations and analyses of such reverses, the reader is referred to *Defending Professionalism: A Resource for Librarians, Information Specialists, Knowledge Managers, and Archivists* (Crowley 2012).

As summarized by Linda Neyer (2014, 112), it is presently the case in multiple geographical, organizational, online, and educational contexts that

> *the stakeholders who fund libraries will not be convinced alone by arguments and studies to prove that their work is essential* [italics added]. The stakeholders also need to hear from individuals in our communities, including parents, students, educators, employers, and others, about the urgent need for librarians and libraries in 21st-century American society.

Too often significant stakeholders, particularly funders, are not provided with reliable accounts by library and information professionals on how their services advance stakeholder agendas or otherwise contribute to stakeholder professional and/or personal benefit. Writing in the May 2014 issue of *Public Management,* a publication of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), Gerhart and Hasbargen stressed that in the effort to "successfully improve the complex and interconnected issues facing communities today . . . one resource that might be undervalued and overlooked by managers is the public library." This article reflected five years of cooperation with the library community, and provided city and county managers with information that public libraries are more than "quiet places surrounded by books" but are also suppliers of

- digital media labs;
- 3-D printers;
- virtual and in-person homework help;
- Internet and information safety;
- GED and post-secondary education;
- resume and interview skill building;

- job search centers; and
- language instruction (2014, 7).

Support for the role of libraries evidenced through publication in ICMA's official journal is clearly welcome by the public library community and its supporters. However, one might wonder why the readers of *Public Management* were not previously informed by their own local libraries of the benefits of cities and counties working with the library community? Time and again, contemporary library and information organizations have failed to manage the perceptions of decision makers in positive library/information directions (Stenstrom and Haycock 2014, 51–53). The result has been cutbacks in support that are difficult to restore totally, even with a strong, if reactive, advocacy campaign.

As Stenstrom and Haycock (2015, 38) conclude after their extensive investigation of the literature dealing with cutbacks in library funding:

> Too often advocacy campaigns are developed as a reaction to the threat of a funding decrease, or indeed, after reduced financial support has been shown by local and state funding bodies. Faced with a cut, it is common for library supporters to feel threatened so their reactions are frequently characterized by a tone of outrage and protest. In a few instances, the results have softened the blow but large-scale efforts in mobilizing angry patrons rarely result in a full reversal of the decision, and likely make any future negotiations even more tense.

Many such setbacks, resulting from failures to promote constructive community or organizational powerbroker judgements about libraries and information programs, can be traced to an insufficient application of the skills, often reflecting professional tacit knowledge (Crowley 1999) needed to sustain such programs.

Gaps in the Professional Development Supply Chain

The persistence of such advocacy malfunctions suggests the widespread inability or unwillingness of library and information professionals to use effective marketing and advocacy approaches to identify, address, and report back on how successfully they advance stakeholder priorities. Contributing to this deficiency are identifiable knowledge gaps in what might be termed the "professional development supply chain." Such gaps can often be identified by asking such questions as the following:

- Are future library and information practitioners being properly instructed in the realities of marketing and advocacy in their professional educations?
- Are the services delivered by such library and information professionals based on knowledge derived from long-established and effective marketing approaches?

- Do library and information professionals spend valuable "face time" with those who control their budgets?

Too often, fully or partially negative answers to these questions are provided by new graduates and long-serving practitioners alike. It is a deficiency that does not bode well for the future of library and information professionals and their organizations.

Problem Statement—"Inconvenient Facts"

Nearly a century ago the famed German sociologist Max Weber described the critical role of bringing people face-to-face with "inconvenient facts" that challenge their existing assessments of the meaning of their experiences (1946, 147). Weber's insights help define the problem addressed by this essay. Simply stated, there exist certain "extremely inconvenient" and quite erroneous discernments in library and information contexts that diminish the value—or even prevent the transmission—of vital aspects of *professional tacit knowledge*. Unless recognized and addressed, the resulting and largely unaddressed realities will hamper any effort by LIS practitioners to ensure that their professional "value spheres" (Weber 1946, 147) continue to exist and thrive within contemporary societies.

Among these inconvenient facts is the ever-relevant management truism that *doing something well is far less important than determining that something is well to do in the first place.* Too often things excellently done can contribute little to the perceived relevance of library and information programs. This is particularly so in times of substantial change. The example of original cataloging, which employed many library professionals in the mid-twentieth century, comes to mind. Subsequent to this heyday, the development of MARC (MAchine-Readable Cataloging) and rise of OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) and other centralized library record sources in electronic formats changed economic models for allocating library dollars. Copy cataloging, for instance, replaced much of professional-level classification with substantial savings in personnel costs. With the expenses of organizing collections thus reduced, funds and personnel could be freed up for other library priorities. At present, many libraries that insist on maintaining their own idiosyncratic cataloging approaches open themselves up to accusations of misuse of organizational funds.

Shared databases and lower-paid personnel organizing library material drove considerable library and information transformations in the late twentieth century. Of late, the ability of present and potential customers to access alternative web sources of information through convenient search engines and social networks is producing yet another revolution in library and information reference services (Garmer 2014; Zickuhr et al. 2013).

The central problem addressed in this essay is the reality that far too many library and information professionals are operating on versions of professional tacit knowledge that encourage excellence in delivering services deemed irrelevant or of minimal applicability to the priorities of elected officials, organizational leaders, significant customers, and existing or potential funders. The library and information professionals involved often fail to discern critical stakeholder needs and thereby fail to design programs that advance priority community and organizational aims. Since professional tacit knowledge itself is inherently conservative (Crowley 2014, 39), the increasing value of emerging services and the declining worth of longstanding, services may not be perceived. Such marketing ignorance can result in subsequent perceptions of program irrelevance. To the extent they are identified as irrelevant, library and information programs become cost centers to be minimized instead of resources to be valued and developed.

Competition and the "Facts" about Library and Information Program Survival

Libraries and information centers faced competition or even replacement long before the growth of the web-provided information and reading material. In 1993, *Marketing and Libraries Do Mix: A Handbook for Libraries and Information Centers* was published by the State Library of Ohio. Drawing on a year of research and collaborative development, the report stressed, "Whether you have recognized it or not, the competition is out there . . . If you believe in the value of your organization and its services, it is absolutely necessary that you strengthen them and validate their worth for your customers. The result of ignoring the needs of your customers will be that they will become someone else's customers" (Tenney, State of Ohio, and Western Reserve Associates 1993, 8).

Who Are the Practitioners?

Practitioners lacking effective advocacy and marketing tacit knowledge discussed in this essay include but are not limited to (a) those who teach and research in library and information fields (broadly defined) within programs accredited by the American Library Association, and (b) those who are employed in professional capacities in library and information contexts and organizations (broadly defined). Current students in such programs are considered to be aspiring professionals.

What Is Tacit Knowledge?

It is a truism that tacit knowledge is often best conveyed through stories (Davenport and Prusak 1998, 81–83). To illustrate how imprecisely definable tacit knowledge can nevertheless be transferred, this author will elaborate on a library version of the long-established and effective approach termed "sitting next to Nellie" (Cohen 2013). For this discussion, Nellie can be considered to be the best children's librarian in a major city public library. Nellie regularly creates noteworthy children's programs with seeming ease, develops great hard copy and e-collections, manages a first-rate department web presence, and effectively instructs parents on how they can encourage their children to read. Additionally, she has a side-business of leading workshops around the state and nation, made possible through efficient use of the significant vacation time the library accords long-serving employees.

The managers of the city library, understanding how Nellie's effective tacit knowledge needs to be sustained and retained, long ago began the custom of assigning new children's librarians to work alongside her for at least six months. It was believed that this approach was largely responsible for raising the level of youth services throughout the city library's branches. The most persistent problem associated with "Nellie's disciples" is that librarians trained by Nellie have such a great reputation that they are frequently lured away with higher salaries by adjacent, even distant, public libraries. Consequently, vacant youth services positions are regularly being advertised by the city library. Nonetheless, enough librarians trained by Nellie remain that, even with her upcoming retirement, Nellie's tacit knowledge of effective children's services will not be lost.

Of late, Nellie has agreed to devote time in her work schedule to transforming whatever is possible of her tacit knowledge about delivering effective children's services into explicit viewable and readable knowledge more easily available to others. She is doing so by starring in a series of videos and writing a "how to" handbook, both of which the library intends to market with royalties accruing to Nellie. When asked why she had delayed agreeing to such tacit knowledge capture methods, Nellie confessed that she had been concerned that such videos and the handbook could be used to substitute for assigning new children's librarians to work with her. Nellie had long found such tutoring to be the best part of her job.

For Nellie, this extended mentoring process involved bringing herself up to date by learning from the "newbies" what was being taught in their master's degree programs (explicit knowledge), what they had learned working at other libraries (tacit knowledge), or what they had found in the online and hardcopy literature (explicit knowledge). Nellie, in turned, shared both the electronic and paper resources (explicit) she had accumulated over the years and her own difficulty in explaining expertise (tacit). In short, Nellie's own know-how was refreshed, in part, through the give-and-take approach of learning from "newbies" even as she provided them with the explicit and tacit knowledge that had made her reputation.

Nellie's story, an amalgam of narratives encountered over years of teaching and working in off-campus library and information positions, was constructed to showcase the benefits of professional tacit knowledge and to provide suggestions on how to avoid, at least in part, the conservative tendency of such learning. The key question becomes "how does one transmit good institutional knowledge while filtering out the bad, unnecessary, or irrelevant?" (Richey and Lathrop 2014, 25). Mentors such as Nellie can be responsible for significant service improvements, particularly if they are recognized and rewarded for transmitting their expertise. However, they can also directly or indirectly communicate adverse values such as the beliefs that "Nellie's way is the only way," that electronic gaming is a negative for children, or that "good" children's programs do not have to be based on first identifying child and caretaker needs. Such misconceptions can work against necessary changes in trying times. Unless refreshed with new practices and theories, tacit knowledge can become a cautious reality that cherishes what currently works at the expense of perceiving when present-day practices, although now successful, may no longer be relied upon to meet customer needs and thereby safeguard an organization's future (Crowley 2014).

While tacit knowledge is notoriously difficult to define and capture, many of its characteristics are still knowable. Crowley (2001, 568) found that numerous reports in social science, military, and other fields underscored that tacit knowledge is often

- personal in origin;
- valuable to the possessor;
- job specific;
- related to context;
- difficult to fully articulate;
- both known in part and unknown in part to the possessor;
- transmitted, where transmission is possible, through interpersonal contact;
- operative on an organizational level;
- applied, in part, through "if-then" rules (if certain conditions exist, then apply the following);
- capable of becoming explicit knowledge and vice versa;
- intertwined with explicit knowledge along unstable knowledge borders; and
- poorly reflected in contemporary knowledge literature.

The reality that advocacy and marketing tacit knowledge are "capable of becoming explicit knowledge and vice versa" may be the most crucial but least discussed element in educating future library and information professionals. Simply by existing, a library or information program intentionally or unintentionally "markets" itself and its services well or badly. Unplanned marketing and advocacy are usually unproductive in the long run and risk generating perceptions with influential stakeholders that the organization, at best, is unworthy of substantial resources.

Although regularly influenced by technological developments, the elements of effective marketing have been known and utilized for decades by practitioners in a wide spectrum of fields and disciplines (Tenney, State Library of Ohio, and Western Reserve Associates 1993). Correspondingly, aspiring librarians, information specialists, knowledge managers, and archivists can be taught effective approaches of marketing and advocacy through readily available textbooks and handbooks (Dowd, Evangeliste, and Silberman 2010; Elliott 2012). Marketing and advocacy expertise (tacit knowledge) codified into explicit knowledge and taught in a full library and information graduate course can be of immense value in protecting and expanding programs. Through repeated use in the field, such knowledge can be modified to meet changing contexts and, when again codified, help formulate the necessary professional philosophies and practices for the next generation of library and information professionals.

The teaching of effective advocacy and marketing expertise in an ALA-accredited program will obviously require library and information professors and other instructors to embrace its value. Mahroeian and Forozia's review of the literature (2012, 307) stressed that tacit knowledge in general remained an ambiguous area of study and further observed "the significance of tacit knowledge in the knowledge resources of an organization can be considered important although *the interest in scientific circles has been rather insignificant* [italics added]. An increase in interest can, however, be noticed in recent years." Unfortunately, while library and information fields have shared to a limited extent this revived interest in tacit knowledge, there seems to remain a research disinterest in addressing its conservative nature and transferability and their effects on program survivability.

The noted Harvard University theoretician Chris Argyris (1999, 123) helped to open the door for considerations on the macro level when he noted,

> Routines are implemented through skillful actions. Actions that are skillful are based largely on tacit knowledge. Such actions become self-reinforcing of the status quo. The self-reinforcing features tend to reduce inquiry into gaps and inconsistencies in the tacit knowledge. When these surface, they are often embarrassing or threating.

In the for-profit sector, business students have long been made aware of the fundamental tacit knowledge blunder of the twentieth century American railroad industry and its managers. These nearsighted leaders were convinced their future was fundamentally and immovably centered on the matter of running railroads, including passenger railroads. Although they were custodians of a major form of conveyance, such managers did not understand they were actually in the transportation, not the railroad, business. Although their advocacy skills were often first rate, the early to mid-twentieth-century absence of a marketing perspective with these railroad managers limited their ability to go beyond their track-bound tacit knowledge to embrace the possibilities offered by passenger air travel and rapid cargo transportation.

Library and Information Tacit Knowledge

An August and September, 2016, review of a variety of relevant, English-language data-bases by the author revealed that tacit knowledge has lately become a subject of enhanced interest in business and a variety of other fields and disciplines. However, there is only a limited concern in core library and information fields (Choo 2000; Chu 2007; Dillon 2007; Fister 2013; Richey and Lathrop 2014; Panahi, Watson, and Partridge 2016). A relatively early contribution to the literature addressing the application and misapplication of tacit knowledge was provided by Crowley (2001) in "Tacit Knowledge, Tacit Ignorance, and the Future of the Academic Library." This article contends that college and university librarians, responding to the arrival of a self-service information world, need to stop envisioning their contested information domain through a misleading academic librarian lens. Instead, they ought to adopt the perspectives of teaching and research faculty, as well as administrators, when envisioning needed services

The work of Choo (2000, 395) addresses the need to consider other contexts or cultures in which people need to demonstrate value. "In organizations, tacit knowledge is the personal knowledge used by members to perform their work and to make sense of their worlds. It is learned through extended periods of experience and doing a task, during which the individual develops a feel for, and a capacity to make intuitive judgements about, the successful execution of the activity. . . . Since tacit knowledge is experimental and contextualized it cannot be easily codified, written down or reduced to rules and recipes. Despite it being difficult to articulate, tacit knowledge can be, and is, regularly transferred and shared. Tacit knowledge can be learned through observation and imitation."

The separate observations by Crowley (2001) and Choo (2000) can be taken together to form a background for consideration of the value deficit that afflicts too many libraries, information centers, knowledge management operations, and archives.

Identifying A Value Deficit

In a recent handout developed to help educate Kansas public library trustees, a critical point was stressed about the misguided professional judgments of their librarians regarding the perceived value of their library and its services.

> Librarians have a tendency to think that excellent library services will be rewarded by the community. The truth is that excellent library service

> is only half of the equation for a successful library. The library must be perceived by the community as being essential to the quality of life in the community. . . .
>
> Keep in mind the fundamental principle of influence. "*Influence is derived from the perceptions of the person to be influenced, not from the perceptions of the person doing the influencing. The key to building your influence lies in your ability to shape the perceptions of others.*" (italics in original) (Kansas Trustee Education Program 2012, [2]).

Unfortunately, in operating on the basis of an erroneous professional tacit knowledge that holds their worth to be both well-accepted and self-evident, the professional and other staff of libraries have incurred what Germano (2011, 100) terms "the library value deficit." This dearth of appreciation has resulted from reliance on a "publicly held assumption of goodwill for libraries and the social benefits they represent," something that is "no longer sustainable in an environment composed of competition for funds, increased scrutiny for their expenditure, and enhanced competition." Such misunderstanding has affected both libraries and librarians since the increasingly negative customer perceptions of the value of "library" are undermining the status of both (Germano 2011, 102). This reality is not limited to contexts in the United States since library and librarian ill-positioning in the public mind is international in its reach. Canadian researchers Schrader and Brundin (2012, 8), for example, have found that "recent research points to a perception that the library is not making a critical and essential contribution to the issues facing communities today."

The observation by Schrader and Brundin parallels the discernment by funders and other stakeholders, many located in the United States, of an absence of significant library and information contributions to solving critical issues facing communities and organizations (Gerhart and Hasbargen 2014). Such widespread perceptions of library and information irrelevance suggest a near-comprehensive explanation for the largely negative outcomes described at the beginning of this essay. When library and information programs are undervalued, it is largely because the professionals employed to provide services have failed to manage the perceptions of funders and customers alike. Addressing this perceived value deficit is the primary rationale for the solutions to be advanced to what can only be perceived as a fundamental and transnational library and information problem.

Succeeding Through Relevant Tacit Knowledge?

"The State of America's Libraries 2016: A Report from The American Library Association" (Rosa 2016, 2) proclaims the value of Libraries Transform, its latest national promotional effort.

> Libraries Transform seeks to shift the mindset that "libraries are obsolete or nice to have" to "libraries are essential," and change the perception that "libraries are just quiet places to do research, find a book, and

> read" to "libraries are centers of their communities: places to learn, create, and share, with the help of library staff and the resources they provide." The Libraries Transform campaign is designed to increase public awareness of the value, impact, and services provided by library professionals and libraries of all types.

It is likely that the majority of the publicly-supported libraries, particularly public libraries, would endorse these profile-raising objectives. Public libraries in particular have found themselves trying to resist the idea that they are simply tax-supported versions of Google that are more difficult to use and lack justification for continued survival in a self-service information environment.

Dowd and Rich (2016, 29) have summarized the three "key questions" of the Libraries Transform campaign as:

- How do we shift perceptions of the library from "obsolete" or "nice to have" to essential?
- How do we energize library professionals?
- How do we build external advocates?

The ultimate aim of the Libraries Transform campaign has been crystalized as "Libraries Transform is designed to reframe the conversation about libraries so we can influence key policymakers, thought leaders, funders, and decision makers to increase support for libraries of all kinds" (Dowd and Rich 2016, 29). For the historically minded, this aim seems to echo the findings of the mid-twenty century *Public Library Inquiry*. In the 1950 concluding volume of its research, the *Public Library Inquiry* stressed the need to overcome "the political weaknesses of the public library in the face of an evident need to develop public support for improved structures and extended services" (Leigh and Public Library Inquiry Project 1950, 134).

Inasmuch as this essay addresses a spectrum of professionals in fields ranging from librarianship and information science to knowledge management and archives, as well as related professions taught in American Library Association-accredited programs, it is appropriate to change these Libraries Transform questions slightly in a more inclusive direction:

- How do we shift perceptions of the library and information center from "obsolete" or "nice to have" to essential?
- How do we energize library and information professionals?
- How do we build external or organizational advocates?

How Do We Shift Perceptions of the Library and Information Center from "Obsolete" or "Nice to Have" to Essential?

Shifting discernments in positive library and information directions must involve an understanding of the psychological and other forces that resist changes in the perceptions of influential stakeholders, particularly nonusers. As the Kansas trustee document (Kansas Trustee Education Program 2012) reminds us, it is the funder/customer/user/patron's perceptions that matter. In the for-profit sector, one major metric for evaluating the worth of the services provided by a corporate library, information center, knowledge management center, competitive data analysis department, etc., has been ROI or Return on Investment. ROI has been illustrated by Matarazzo and Pearlstein (2013, 67) as the need to "contribute demonstrably to your organization's success or risk becoming marginalized and an easy answer to the question, 'Where can we cut costs?'"

The Urban Institute/Center for What Works document "Candidate Outcome Indicators: Advocacy Program" stresses that, in the new era of demonstrating outcomes, there is an important if sometimes overlooked reality; it is unlikely that the reasons for a given outcome, successful or unsuccessful, can actually be identified:

> Outcome information seldom, if ever, tells why the outcomes have occurred. Many internal and external factors can contribute to any outcome. Instead, use the outcome data to identify what works well and what does not. Use the data to determine for which categories of clients your procedures and policies are working well and for which they are not working well. To the extent that the program is not working as well as expected, then attempt to find out the reasons. This investigation process leads to continuous learning and program improvement. (2016, 1)

The complicated, often subjective, process for measuring success in library and information contexts is seen by Crowley (2013, 24) as being resistant to facts. It reflects an organizational or community culture where often unstated "rules" are often in play. Such rules need to be identified and overcome or accommodated in any effort to bring about the value alteration represented by the "How do we shift perceptions . . . ?" question:

> Historic standards for measuring the value of library and information programs and services in public sectors have changed. . . . At a time of massive public liabilities, imposed tax limitations, and growing outcries against high tuition and immense student debt, most program reductions, including layoffs, are subjective in nature. Too often the data offered to justify such cutbacks provide a thin veneer of apparent objectivity for decisions made on subjective perceptions regarding how much or little the library or information unit seems to support the values and priorities of those who control the money.

In political arenas, facts can have little or no influence since "often the validity of behavioral and social information is measured against standards embodied in the consensus of prevailing social and political values. Verified or even non-verified behavioral and social information will be used in policymaking if it coincides with these values" (Library of Congress

Congressional Research Service 1986, 221). In other words, what others might term errors, illusions, or biases concerning libraries and information centers can and sometimes do have more influence than validated and more positive information.

Obstacles to Changing Perceptions of Libraries, Librarians and Information Specialists

Examination of the progression of library and information personnel from professional education to retirement reveals a primary cause of the inability of libraries and information centers to secure recognition and support for community or organizational priorities. The cause lies in the unwillingness of almost all programs accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) to require full courses devoted to marketing. Crowley (2012, 26) visited relevant web sites to discover if any schools within the system of ALA-accredited programs require that all master's degree students take courses in marketing and advocacy.

> A preliminary web review of program home pages suggested that this is far from the case. However, several sidebar conversations with other LIS faculty produced claims that marketing and advocacy are covered effectively in certain required courses even when the terms "marketing" and "advocacy" are absent from their titles or even their course descriptions.

In response to a request for information posted by the author on the JESSE listserv, Karen Snow of Dominican University's School of Information Studies (personal communication, October 3, 2016) forwarded a summary of her findings from the summer of 2016 when she "went to the websites of all of the ALA-accredited LIS programs and collected the course titles of the required courses for each program. I didn't include the course descriptions, so it's entirely possible that advocacy and marketing are a large part of some of these courses. But as you can see, only Syracuse has a course that includes 'marketing' in the title."

In academic contexts, an important subject rates a required course of its own. If the course is an elective (optional) or a subject is only part of a required course, it is a clear statement that the subject involved is not considered to be of fundamental importance. It is possible to assume that part of the rationale for this omission relates to the fact that ALA-accredited programs are organizations, and "organizations consist of people who have interests of their own, most notably preserving and enhancing a comfortable status quo" (Tetlock and Gardner 2015, 95). The deeper reasons for the lack of required courses devoted to marketing and advocacy may relate directly to the absence of full-time faculty who have practical or educational experience with both subjects or the imperatives of the tenure clock that demand levels of publication that might better be achieved through dissemination in journals more related to a professor's dissertation. Comments by Crowley (2013, 26) on the subject are suggestive of the limited effects of one or two class sessions in preparing future library and information marketers and advocates:

> The author hesitates to doubt the assertions of fellow educators for what they teach and how effectively they teach it. However, the funding realities of the post-2007 library and information worlds suggest a more complicated reality. Based on the extraordinary number and widespread nature of cutbacks, if tenured professors, professors of practice, and adjunct instructors are indeed teaching advocacy and marketing to all students enrolled in a given ALA-accredited program, the skills and understandings are either poorly communicated or are soon forgotten.

The value of providing all students in ALA-accredited programs with sufficient knowledge of both marketing and advocacy to develop positive perceptions in stakeholders was reinforced in 2014 by the OCLC document *At a Tipping Point: Education, Learning and Libraries: A Report to the OCLC Membership*. This report stressed that "our 2014 research tells us that the library brand remains firmly grounded as the 'book brand'" (De Rosa et al. 2014, 51). Inasmuch as potential and present customers continued to associate libraries with increasingly less-relevant physical books and buildings, OCLC, drawing on the work of brand expert David Allen Aaker, strongly stressed that "strong, enduring brands adapt to market dynamics; are continuously energized to remain vibrant; remain relevant by creating and promoting clear differentiators that match the consumer needs while retaining congruency with the expectations of the brand" (De Rosa et al. 2014, 55).

Recognition of the poor level of library marketing has even penetrated the wider world. In 2013 an article entitled "Libraries: Good Value, Lousy Marketing" appeared in *Publishers Weekly* (Kenney 2013). The article summarized the results of a then recent Pew Study (Zickuhr et al. 2013) and expressed surprise that so many people highly valued a public library that they knew so little about.

Contemporary library programs need to understand and modify customer perceptions of the ongoing relevance of librarians, library collections, buildings, and other assistances. But the means to do so, advocacy and marketing, are ranked low in the curricula of ALA-accredited programs. Other subjects, usually related to faculty interests, educations, and experiences, inevitably take precedence. It is doubtless the case that many other subjects of library and information instruction offer positive results for one or more segments of student customers. Nevertheless, for several decades in Anglophone and Francophone North America, as well as in the United Kingdom, the primary approaches to enhancing relevance for the customer or user segments served by other professions have increasingly been marketing and advocacy. The best such courses draw on both explicit knowledge taught in onsite and online classes and tacit knowledge learned in the field to provide quality learning experiences.

Overcoming Obstacles to Changing Perceptions of the Library and Information Center

There are several deep-seated obstacles to ALA-accredited programs adopting a positive approach to requiring marketing and advocacy courses. The first difficulty is the often overlooked reality that “field” practitioners live in very different worlds from the faculty practitioners who teach in ALA-accredited programs (Crowley 2005). These worlds vary in their rules and rewards. In the faculty environment both explicit and tacit knowledge support a reality for teaching and researching often arcane subjects that off-campus practitioners see as irrelevant to their worlds. In the academic context, publication about arcane, even obscure subjects, can actually result in faculty promotion and tenure (Crowley 2005). Another obstacle to effective instruction in marketing and advocacy arises out of the fact that each ALA-accredited program decides for itself what it will teach and research.

The American Library Association’s current *Standards for Accreditation of Master’s Programs in Library and Information Studies, Adopted February 2, 2015* (ALA Committee for Accreditation 2015, 3) specifically states, “The evidence supplied by the program in support of the Standards is evaluated against the statement of the program’s mission and its program goals and objectives.” In consequence, if a program does not want to require full course(s) in advocacy and marketing, it simply avoids listing the subjects as priority objectives in the program “statement” submitted for reaccreditation.

It is not the fact that resources for advocacy and marketing instruction or topics for research do not exist. Web resources aside, electronic and paper texts useful for the graduate education of the library and information professionals have long been available, usually drawing from the tacit knowledge of expert practitioners (Crowley 1999; Dowd, Evangeliste, and Silberman 2010; Elliott 2012). Given the priority places held by marketing and advocacy in modern contexts, the failure to provide required courses in these closely-related subjects comes close to representing educational malpractice. This lack has the ongoing effect of sending new professionals into the library and information fields who are woefully equipped to help their programs survive.

The solution to this seemingly intractable state of affairs is for the various ALA-accredited programs to make program and practitioner effectiveness a priority through what Saffo has termed the “systematic and disciplined application of common sense” (2007, 131). Knowledge of effective marketing and advocacy is absolutely necessary in ROI-driven, results-oriented, contemporary financial, service, and governmental markets. If established library and information programs do not survive or reduce their hiring, those library and information educators who have not reoriented their programs to meet such priority professional needs as advocacy and marketing might well become candidates for the rubbish heap of irrelevant academic history.

How Do We Energize Library and Information Professionals?

Energizing library and information professionals is both assisted and handicapped by threats to their budgets and job security. On the plus side, a fight over library funding can be extraordinarily energizing (Peet 2015). So, too, can be the exhausting process of working with likeminded library and information professionals to set up a state advocacy network (Crowley, Maravilla, and Moreau 1985). Nonetheless, the ALA Libraries Transform campaign was developed, in part, because library and information personnel were not sufficiently committed and equipped to lead needed changes (Dowd and Rich 2016).

Obstacles to Energizing Library and Information Professionals

Since the late twentieth century a number of transformations, some self-directed, have negatively impacted components of the library and information communities. The morale-destroying influence of the implementation of OCLC's electronic copy cataloging, an extended process that ultimately limited the availability of positions for aspiring professional catalogers, was largely beyond the control of those affected. The more broad-based funding and employment reductions of the Great Recession of 2007 and its aftermath had a much speedier impact. These past and continuing cuts continue to erode the morale of many librarians and information specialists.

Parallel to this development has been the negative impact on reference professionals resulting from the rise of self-service information acquisition through Google and social networks. As described by Brabazon (2014, 195), "The literature of librarianship and disintermediation conveys a depressing tale. While the mid- to late-1990s offered optimism at the empowerment of library users, by the 2010s, disintermediation was blamed for the loss of libraries and the credibility of librarianship."

The author (Crowley 1994; Crowley, Maravilla, and Moreau 1985) has been involved in the difficult process of attempting to develop effective library and information advocates while working with practitioners impacted by threats to funding and jobs. Training advocates is not an easy task, even in the best of times. It becomes even more difficult when educators provide library and information professionals, already challenged by personnel and funding reductions and limited job prospects, with gratuitous and problematic advice. Such guidance appears in the influential *Re-envisioning the MLS: Findings, Issues and Considerations* (Bertot, Sarin, and Percell 2015, v) where aspiring professionals are told that their expensive educations are inappropriate for a number of positions in their library and information organizations:

> There is an increasing acknowledgement that those with other degrees (e.g., Instructional Design/Education; Design; Social Work; Public Health; Analytics; IT/IS; Human Resources Management) and skills might meet various needs better and that our information organizations should be open to those with a range of degrees other than the MLS.

This problematic statement was presented as "the" solution to a perceived human resource problem. Yet, it omits such profession-friendly alternatives as (1) hiring librarians and information specialists with undergraduate degrees in the areas listed; (2) hiring such specialists on the condition that they will earn the MLS or equivalent degree while working; (3) paying the tuition of existing staff to take appropriate courses; or (4) arranging for current personnel to spend time on an internship at another library or information center known for expertise in a given subject.

Re-envisioning the MLS: Findings, Issues, and Considerations (Bertot, Sarin, and Percell 2015) is offered by the University of Maryland's iSchool as a resource for "the larger MLS education, professional, and research communities." As such, it has the potential to serve as a keystone for the future of ALA-accredited education. The negative implications for field practitioners of such a development are many. Claiming a lack of job relevance of the MLS and its equivalents for significant positions may offer the possibility of easier recruitment and/or reducing personnel costs. Applicants with such emerging qualifications may be many in a seemingly endless tight U.S. job market. Driven by recruitment and cost considerations, the iSchool's problematic assertion may become a self-fulfilling prophecy or "a shared belief that is false initially, but the consequences of people acting consistently with that belief results in it coming true" (Rosenblatt and Gieryn 1982). The last thing needed by library and information professionals and aspiring professionals, as well as their present or potential employers and other stakeholders, is advice from educators to hire outsiders for the fewer remaining professional-level positions.

This analysis of this aspect of *Re-envisioning the MLS: Findings, Issues, and Considerations* does not claim that those affiliated with the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies deliberately intended to undermine the job prospects of many of the iSchool's graduates through their MLS enquiry. This library and information "job killer" approach should not be seen as malevolent but as an action more in the tradition of "the unanticipated consequences of purposive social action" (Merton 1936). In this light, it is possible to surmise that the assertion by Bertot, Sarin, and Percell (2015) is likely the result of a lack of reflection regarding how such guidance might impact the worlds of library and information practitioners. In short, these researchers forgot to ask the all-important "What next?" question.

An alternative to advocating reductions in the number of positions available to professional librarians and information specialists, particularly in traditional employers, was offered in "Tentative Components of the Twenty-First Century Public Library Educational Agenda," contained in "Suicide Prevention: Safeguarding the Future of the Professional Librarian" (Crowley 2006, 78). Point 2 in this agenda sought professional and funder

> *recognition that privileging the master's degree from a program accredited by the ALA, by hiring whenever possible staff who possess the traditional educational gold standard of the library profession, may be the only viable method of avoiding ongoing librarian deprofessionalization as dictated through use of the corporate business model in public Libraries.* (emphasis in original)

Crowley's assessment would also be applicable to academic and school libraries. Its premise follows the logic that if the library and information communities do not support their own professionalism, why should funders and other stakeholders do so?

Effectively energizing library and information professionals is a continuing process that requires extensive preparation and both explicit and tacit knowledge. From the explicit knowledge gained from required courses in marketing and advocacy in professional education, through the tacit knowledge expanded by working with more experienced professionals in local, state, and national advocacy and marketing campaigns, as well as by means of functioning effectively on state and national library and information association legislative committees, the process is ongoing. One of the more comprehensive cross-fields resources available in the area of advocacy is *Defending Professionalism: A Resource for Librarians, Information Specialists, Knowledge Managers, and Archivists* (Crowley 2012), which lists a number of other advocacy tools. Additional sources for readers to deepen their learning about library and information marketing assistance include works in this essay's reference list and topical monographs and articles published by ALA and state associations (Elliott 2012; Potter 2012).

How Do We Build External or Organizational Advocates?

What Should We Advocate?

In *Part of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library*, Wiegand (2015, 264) stresses a crucial truth that would reflect their service realities if it were amended to include all types of libraries and information centers: "Because people do not have to use a public library, what patrons want—and by *their* definition, what they need—gives them a power most other civic institutions deny them and forces public libraries to balance competing community needs." Terms such as *corporate information center*, *university library*, *school library media center*, and *county historical society* could be substituted in the preceding quotation without distorting the reality of Wiegand's claim.

Briefly stated, libraries and information centers must respond positively to customer needs. Albert (2014, 635) provides a simple outline of how a library or information center can both meet stakeholder needs and encourage stakeholders to become advocates:

- Adopt stakeholder priorities as library priorities
- Understand and measure what matters most to stakeholders
- Communicate that value involves sharing the results of assessment with stakeholder groups in a way that is most appealing and meaningful to them

This approach is reflective of the "customer first" mentality underlying most, if not all, modern marketing and advocacy methodologies. Furthermore, the concept of "brand advocacy" (Walter 2013) where customers, through a multifaceted exchange of information and opinion, become advocates for a given organization or product, offers great potential for library and information programs.

All effective marketing and advocacy approaches require planning. Marketing resources have already been discussed (above). Numerous works on library and information advocacy exist, including the excellent Canadian Association of Public Libraries' (CAPL) *Library Advocacy Now! A Training Program for Public Library Staff and Trustees (*2011), the American Library Association's (ALA) Advocacy University (2016), and the Pennsylvania Library Association's (PaLA) Library Advocacy 101 (2016). Space limitations will not permit a fuller recounting of available resources. As an alternative, given the reality that advocacy can be characterized as a specialized form of marketing, it is possible to take the bare-bones approach provided decades ago in *Marketing and Libraries Do Mix: A Handbook for Libraries and Information Centers* (Tenney, State Library of Ohio, and Western Reserve Associates 1993) as a basis for providing relevant services. This approach fits the awareness that, in order to advocate, one has to have something to advocate for, either in being or in preparation.

This *Marketing and Libraries Do Mix* model includes

- self-assessment—evaluating the strengths and weakness of your organization;
- market definition—deciding what groups of customers you will serve, and which have priority;
- product planning—determining what services your customers want and need and how you will provide them;

- product creation—building the products defined in your plan with an emphasis on quality;
- selling—informing your customers of your services, getting them "in the door," and performing with excellence; and
- closing the loop—embedding marketing in your organization's way of doing business. (Tenney, State Library of Ohio, and Western Reserve Associates 1993, 7).

Since most libraries and information centers already exist, planning for their marketing programs often involves transforming existing undertakings to meet stakeholder preferences. On a practical basis, marketing planning must go hand-in-hand with formulating effective advocacy to secure the support necessary to deliver the services deemed relevant to identified stakeholder needs.

Who Should Advocate?

The best advocates for library and information programs are the stakeholders who control community or organizational resources. If elected (mayor, city council) and appointed (city manager) leaders see the program as a benefit to themselves and their agendas, it is likely to be funded. Other leaders who value the worth of the program—and who can influence major funding stakeholders—are also of considerable value. Additionally, successful library and information professionals who are politically astute communicators and who are "collaborative, problem solvers, creative, socially innovative, flexible and adaptable, and have a strong desire to work with the public" (Bertot, Sarin, and Percell 2015) would also tend to be effective advocates on behalf of the library or information center. Finally, other stakeholders with less influence who see a benefit to themselves, their employers and, where appropriate, their families would also be of assistance in assembling a critical mass of perceived supporters.

Here it must be noted that community and organizational stakeholders have usually developed quite a store of relevant tacit knowledge, often through effective use of "face time," in their rise to community or organizational influence. In Hanssen's study of communication effectiveness in local government, it was stressed that "face-to-face contact, the richest communication medium, has the capacity to transfer tacit knowledge by means of the words spoken, the sounds, and stresses, the strength and tone of voice, facial expression and body language" (2008, 340). A community or organizational leader whose extended conversations with effective advocates can know in her or his "gut" the value of a public library to seniors, teens, children, the unemployed, lifelong learners, and readers. A leader with such existing tacit knowledge is not likely to require much additional persuasion to engender support for a public library's programs and budget (Stenström and Haycock 2014).

Conclusions

This essay opened with a series of reports documenting the negative impact of significant stakeholders holding minimally positive or even negative opinions of the value of library and information programs and professionals. Odds are that such views can be the result of a problematic tacit knowledge of libraries and librarians held by stakeholders and developed from years of perceiving them as irrelevant to a community or institution's priorities. Of equal or greater import is the reality that many librarians and information specialists defend their programs based on surveys and statistics, approaches that, at best, are secondary in importance to personal relationships with significant stakeholders. This inability to develop a professional tacit knowledge equal to identifying and addressing organizational or community fiscal and service realities has left libraries and information centers vulnerable to minimization or even elimination. This point, without using the term *tacit knowledge*, was underscored in the observation by Neyer (2014, 112), which addressed the limits of studies and assertions of value in defending libraries and their professional personnel.

Given the reality that tacit knowledge can become explicit knowledge and vice versa, a considerable part of the responsibility for the ignorance of new library and information practitioners of community and organizational realities must be ascribed to ALA-accredited master's degree programs that lack required courses in marketing and advocacy, marketing's closely related sibling. A firm foundation in both areas can ensure a migration from explicit or the "book" knowledge taught online or in classrooms to interior tacit knowledge. In turn, this can become a strong foundation for building understandings of how to determine stakeholder needs and establish a personal relationship with a mayor or school superintendent and her or his networks that aids with obtaining the funding to address them. It is, in short, a virtuous and continuing cycle for securing the human and financial resources necessary for meeting patron, customer, or stakeholder needs for library and information services.

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