

Management Development in Iranian Academic Libraries: Performances and Obstacles

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the current status of management development in academic libraries and it identifies the deterrent factors in administering management development programs. In order to fulfill the aim of the study, 268 managers from 73 academic libraries answered the questions on their need to management development and the current performance of their organizations. They also prioritized the organizational obstacles to their development. The results revealed that, in general, almost all academic library managers express the need for managerial development. In spite of that, in more than half of libraries no management development program has been held. As the results showed, the three most important obstacles to management development include "Not recognized as a need", "Inappropriate appraisal system" and "Lack of suitable program" respectively.

Keywords: Management development, Academic libraries, Iran

Introduction

The same as many other organizations, libraries are committed to achieving their objectives and academic library managers play a key role in this process. Hence, they need to have qualities necessary for the effective performance of their roles. Challenges like the constant changes in technology and environment, shrinking budgets and the shortage of human resources obviate the importance of effective performance of academic library managers. One of the main factors contributing to their effectiveness is constant training and development. Traditionally, training is something that is provided for non-managerial workers, whereas development has been associated with management (Rowley, 1995). Hence, in this article we refer to activities that organizations undertake to train managers as management development (MD).

Morris defines management development as "systematic improvement of managerial effectiveness within the organization, assessed by its contribution to organizational effectiveness" (Wightman and McAleer, 1995, p. 3). And, as McCauley and Van velser argue,

it is also the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in a manager's roles and processes (Suutari and Viitala, 2008, p. 376).

Unfortunately, anecdotal evidence points to the fact that in many cases there is no systematic and official management development program for academic library managers in Iran. The few programs held in some libraries are mostly general and they do not address academic library context issues. Regarding this issue, it would be useful to identify the deterrent factors inhibiting the administration of management development programs in academic libraries in Iran. Therefore, the present research mainly concentrates on identifying the organizational related problems in management development programs. The results of this study could be used to tackle the problems and pave the way for developing academic library managers.

Research background

Regarding the background of this study, it should be noted that many of the studies carried out in the field of management development and management education concentrate on management development requirements and the needs of managers, and academic library organizations are no exception. Besides, a significant number of the researches conducted in the area of management development mostly concentrate on profit organizations.

In his paper, McClure (1980) puts out a clarion call for more attention to be paid to the discipline of management in academic libraries and the need for more formal training in the techniques of management to be provided to librarians. Unfortunately, library managers are ill-equipped to respond to societal information problems via improved managerial techniques. In part, poor performance as a manager and the secondary importance of management could be attributed to a lack of formal managerial preparation.

Current academic libraries demand staff to have a wide range of qualifications and skills, managers inclusive. Morgan (1996) proposes key skills required of the academic librarian in the foreseeable future. He suggests that high quality management is required to ensure that external developments are turned to the advantage of the library service. He also believes that factors such as financial constraints, emphasis on teamwork, devolution of responsibilities and budgets, emphasis on individual performance and the importance of individual time management obviate the fact that managerial responsibilities and competencies need to be more widely adopted.

Johnson (1999) examines issues related to the development of the managerial expertise that underpins the library and information services in Latin America and the Caribbean. His main focus is on the schools of librarianship and information sciences and a small group of employers in the region. By studying the curricula and comparing them with the needs of employers, he found that some of the deterrent factors in management development in the region refer to curricula which lack modern management techniques. Some other factors refer

to the attitudes of teachers of librarianship and information services. That is, they may not quickly recognize the implications of new management techniques for their profession or may not feel comfortable teaching them. As pertains to employers attitudes, they show a lack of familiarity with some management techniques, particularly the most recently promoted approaches. They also mention a shortage of appropriately trained personnel as one of the main problems in management development.

As Fourie suggests, management development pursues three purposes:

Identify and provide a broader base of competence with which to engage an area of responsibility, such as leadership;

Apply this competence to positions within the organization in order to enhance goal achievement; and/or

Provide a working environment, which makes optimal use of human resources for the continuing growth of the institution and the individual (Kruger, 2009 , p. 612).

Teachers play a key role in fulfilling management development programs' purposes. As Elmuti (2004) suggests, not all people are suitable to be taught management just as not all are suitable to teach it. In fact, management teachers must be qualified and credible scholars. He believes that one of the problems in this area is the low salaries of teachers, which makes finding good scholars difficult.

Bopape (2005) regards people in an organization as its most important assets and crucial to its success. He investigates the management development needs of African library managers in performing human resources management activities and tasks. His respondents demonstrate that they need training and development in performing their tasks, especially in areas dealing with interpersonal relations between the managers and staff members than on tasks that are administrative in nature. The respondents also mentioned managing change, team building and communication as important skills and competencies that they would like to enhance.

In his article, Rooney examines the management preparation and development of department heads in ARL libraries. He notes that managerial tasks have sometimes been dismissed as a part of librarianship as a discipline. However, it has gained attention recently. His findings show that while the current state of management preparation, training, and development of middle managers in American academic libraries is quite strong in several areas, it is lacking in some ways as well. His findings refer to the necessity of librarians participating in formal and on-the-job management training before becoming mid-level managers. Otherwise, academic libraries would suffer from a lack of prepared middle level managers (Rooney, 2010).

Method

Sample

The present study targeted academic library managers from 110 governmental university central libraries in Iran, out of which 61 universities were related to The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 39 to The Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education, and 10 to other ministries such as The Ministry of Defense and The Ministry of Energy. A total of 268 academic library managers from 73 academic libraries responded to this study. Based on the received questionnaire, academic library managers were divided into three groups: Top managers (n=48: 17.9%), middle managers (n=26: 9.7%) and supervisors (n=194: 72.4%).

Measure

The present research was part of a project studying different aspects of management development in academic libraries in Iran. The research method was a survey carried out by means of a five-part questionnaire. The main part of the questionnaire, regarding this study, rated the importance of the obstacles to management development on a three-point scale anchored from "important" to "less important". Twelve obstacles were included in this part. The measure also encompasses questions regarding the perception of respondents about the need for management development and management development programs held in their organization.

Results

Respondents' demographic characteristics

A large population of academic library managers (n= 166: 62.4%) were female and only 100 (37.5%) were men.

The age range of academic library managers varied, with the youngest academic library manager at 24 and the oldest at 60 years. The largest number of academic library managers was between 36-40 years old, 58 (25.2 %) of the total respondents. The next largest number of respondents was those between the age group 31-35 years (n= 49: 33.7%). 45 (19.5%) respondents were within the age group of 41-45 years, followed by 43 (18.7%) academic library managers who were less than 30 years old. 19 (8/3%) were in the age group 51-60 and 17 (6.1%) were in the age group 46-50.

Pertaining to the education of the respondents, the results demonstrated that the largest group of academic library managers (n=43: 59/1%) were those who had an undergraduate degree. The smallest group was those with a PhD (n= 13: 5.4%), 50 (20.7%) had a Masters, 22(9.1%) had a diploma, and 14 (8.5%) had associate diplomas.

Pertaining to managerial experience, the results showed that the majority of respondents had been in their management position for less than five years (n=103: 45%). The second majority were those who had 6-1j0 years of managerial experience (n= 69: 30.1 %), followed

by those with 11-15 years of experience (n= 26: 11.4 %). 25 of the academic library managers (10.9 %) had less than 5 years experience followed by those who had between 26-30 years of experience (n= 19: 7.5 %). The academic library managers with 21-25 years of experience were the minority (n= 12: 4.7 %).

The need for training and development of managers

Academic library managers were asked to indicate if they feel the need for development of managers. As shown in Table 1, almost all managers believed that there is a need for the development of managers in their organizations (n= 258: 97.4 %).

Table 1

The need for development of academic library managers

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	258	97.4
No	7	2.6
No response	3	
Total	268	100

Management development programs in academic libraries

Despite the fact that the majority of academic library managers indicated the need for management development, as shown in Table 2, in slightly more than half of the libraries (n= 129: 53.1 %), no management training and development programs have been held.

Table 2

Management development programs in academic libraries in Iran

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	114	46.9
No	129	53.1
No response	3	
Total	268	100

Participation in management training and development programs

Academic library managers were asked to indicate whether they have participated in management training and development programs. In the case that their answer was positive, they were also asked to name the program.

As shown in Table 3, 66.9 percent of respondents had not participated in management training and development programs.

Table 3

Participation in management training and development program

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	33.1	85
No	66.9	172
No response	11	
Total	268	100

In response to an open ended question regarding the management development programs respondents had participated in, the following were named: Strategic management, basic management, conflict management, knowledge management, collaborative management, human resources management, time management and total quality management.

Major obstacles to management development in academic libraries in Iran

Academic library managers were asked to rate the degree of importance of the various obstacles to management development in their organizations on a three point scale.

As illustrated in Table 1, from 12 obstacles ranked in the table, "not recognized as a need", "inappropriate appraisal system" and "lack of suitable program" were perceived as the three most important obstacles. The least important obstacles were "finance/cost", "pressure of work" and "lack of time", respectively.

Table 4

Obstacles to management development in academic libraries

Obstacle	Mean	Rank
Not recognized as a need	1.604	1
Inappropriate appraisal system	1.601	2
Lack of suitable program	1.594	3
No career planning	1.585	4
Inappropriate personnel development policies	1.575	5
Lack of vision	1.563	6
Lack of information	1.481	7
Low commitment	1.457	8
Low priority	1.381	9
Finance/ cost	1.356	10
Pressure of work	1.333	11
Lack of time	1.017	12
Chi Square= 182.254	df=11	Asymp Sig= 0.000

Discussion

The results of this study showed that Iranian academic library managers are predominantly female and the majority of academic library managers had undergraduate degrees. It should be mentioned that management courses which are taught according to a curricula approved by The Ministry of Education in Iran do not cover any subjects regarding the development of managers. This is the case for post graduate degrees as well. Therefore, regardless of the degree of education, academic library managers generally suffer from lack of knowledge in terms of managerial skills and knowledge. Even if training in library schools was enough, academic library managers need on the job training, because what is learned in one management class is not sufficient knowledge to manage a department and is often forgotten before one is in a position to manage a department.

It is found that Iranian academic library managers are mostly young or middle aged. These results are applicable for university administrators to hold managerial development programs. However, age should not be an important factor in management development programs and it would have no influence on the attitudes of managers toward management development programs. As the findings by Suutari and Viitala (2008) show, age has no significant impact on the perceived effectiveness of MD-methods.

The majority (45%) of managers has less than 5 years experience. This result has a positive implication. Less experience means more working years for managers. Based on this result, university administrators should have strategic and long term plans for developing managers.

The results, illustrated in Table 1, 2 and 3 show that in spite of the perceived need for management development among academic library managers, management development is a neglected area in academic library organization. In slightly more than half of academic libraries (53.1 %), there has not been any management development programs held. Some management development programs held in the remaining of the libraries were mostly general and did not address academic library context.

Obstacles to management development

The most important obstacle to management development includes "Not recognized as a need". As it is defined in Webster's new world dictionary, "need is a condition marked by the lack of something requisite or lack of something wanted or deemed necessary" (Agnes, 2004). Need stimulates individuals' actions and thoughts to change the current situation towards a definite direction, say a desired condition (Babaie, 2007). Need is not always self conscious, that is, it is possible that individuals need something but they are not aware of or do not prefer or want it in particular. This implies that individuals are not the best judges of their needs. Their lack of information results in incorrect or poor judgments about their needs (Davaranah, 2007). Therefore, the results of this study implied that university administrators and library managers alike do not deem management development as a need. There could be

some reasons behind this result. Firstly, they are not aware of the need for management development in academic libraries. Secondly, they do not recognize the essential role of management development for the success of their organizations.

"Inappropriate appraisal system" is the second most important obstacle to management development in academic libraries in Iran. Appraisal is an evaluation of performance and its results would illustrate the inefficiencies in managerial performances. Most of the changes in the managerial structure of academic libraries should be based on the appraisal of managers and any development program should be designed according to the findings of the appraisal. As it is found in this study, lack of systematic appraisal of managers results in lack of information about their performance. Therefore, university administrators do not have a clear understanding of academic library managers' strengths and weaknesses. This could be an explanation for the reason behind not recognizing the need for management development as well. Regarding the management development process, it should be noted that, developmental appraisal is the most appropriate approach and is often used as the mechanism for agreeing and monitoring personal development objectives (Rowley, 1995).

Other highly rated obstacles to management development are "Lack of suitable program" and "No career planning". There should be an established, frequently revised program for management development in academic libraries. Lack of such a program in this realm could impair the efficiency of any endeavor to improve managerial performances. In spite of the undeniable role of organizations' administrators in planning the development of managers, it is important that managers themselves, share responsibility for their own personal development strategy, either career-wise or managerial-wise. Management development is the responsibility of both managers and organizations. Therefore, both parties should be committed to management development and have an agreement upon shared objectives for specific time periods (ibid.).

As it was found, the least important obstacles are "Finance/cost", "pressure of work" and "lack of time", respectively. This result highlighted the fact that the most important barriers to management development relate to organizational policies rather than factors such as "Finance/cost" or heavy the work load of managers.

Conclusion

Overall, the current state of management development of managers in Iranian academic libraries is not strong. That is, in slightly more than half of the surveyed academic libraries, there were no management development programs.

The findings of the present study could be used as a framework to surmount the barriers in management development in academic libraries in Iran. This shows that the most important barrier to management development is not recognizing the need for development, which mostly results from unawareness. Therefore, it seems that there is a necessity for mutual

relationships among library and information sciences and management departments and academic library managers. For any development program to be successful, the context of organization should be taken into consideration (Garavan , Barnicle, and O'suilleabhain , 1999). Hence, library and information sciences scholars could provide useful information on the gaps in academic library related managerial performances. On the other hand, management scholars could play a key role in the awareness of academic library managers and university administrators about the deficiencies in their activities and the importance of management development in organizational success. Both parties have a key role in administering management development programs.

Since it is possible to change behaviors by making individuals aware of how they currently behave (McKenna, 2004), it seems that a regular appraisal of managers' performances is necessary among the library managers. It could raise the awareness of managers about their need for management development as well.

Personal responsibility and choice is a significant element of managerial development (Margerison, 1994). Therefore, management development, organizational responsibility aside, is also a responsibility of managers. Iranian academic library managers should independently learn managerial concepts and be committed to that. Otherwise, it is unlikely that any development program would be efficient.

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