

PAPER NO. 0025

Crossed wires: management, communication and culture in public libraries

Abstract

A web-based questionnaire focusing on the attributes required of successful public library managers in the 21st century was distributed to a wide range of public library systems within Australia. Comprising 53 questions grouped into categories, this anonymous questionnaire asked managers to rate themselves against these attributes while staff were asked to rate their managers against the same attributes.

Over 220 responses were received. On all questions, managers rated themselves significantly higher than did staff. The areas of greatest difference between manager and staff ratings related to the more generic skills concerned with team management, the impact of behaviour in the workplace and managing challenging staffing situations. One skills based area, knowledge of copyright and related legal issues, was highlighted by both groups as an area where knowledge was felt to be lacking.

The research concludes by identifying specific areas of professional development or training that would be beneficial for public library managers in building and maintaining an effective work place.

Background

This paper builds on a pilot study undertaken in 2005, which looked at how effective public library managers believed themselves to be across a range of roles, compared to how staff rated their managers in performing these roles. The results from this pilot confirmed evidence found in previous studies in a range of organizations that, generally, managers do tend to estimate their abilities at a higher level than staff perceive them to be and that the gap was widest in areas considered as 'hard' to manage – conflict management and related interpersonal dealings with staff (Pymm and Lodge, 2005). The significance of these results from the pilot study was limited given the small number of respondents who completed the survey. However, the suggestion that this gap appeared to exist, in places quite widely, and the usefulness of the free text comments elicited from this small sample, prompted the authors to develop a wider ranging survey aimed at collecting statistically significant data which could be used to either support or refute the findings of the pilot.

That many adults overestimate their abilities or knowledge in a whole range of situations has been widely reported. In a detailed overview of this area, Dunning, Heath and Suls, (2004) reported research showing students overrating their success in exams and overrating their ability to complete a project in a specific timeframe; lawyers over estimating the likelihood of winning their cases and, soberingly, surgical trainees having too much confidence in their diagnoses after looking at X-rays. Broadly, the research found that for areas where people feel they have a basic understanding or feeling for the subject, they will generally overestimate their capabilities. The authors go on to discuss explanations for what they term the "Above-Average Effect" including a lack of information to help make rational decisions; individuals lacking sufficient knowledge or expertise to have a realistic understanding of the situation but not realizing this and a focus on self without making any comparative judgments (Dunning, Heath and Suls, pp. 8-11).

The evidence that many of us are poor at self-appraisal, applying the Above-Average Effect in many situations, has been seen as "a benefit rather than a cognitive failing to be eradicated" (Bandura, 1994), enabling us to strive towards higher achievements, overcome obstacles and lead more fulfilling lives. This ties in with the commonly held belief that self confidence is a trait to be encouraged and developed, with high levels of self confidence being equated with high levels of self esteem, success and happiness, and the consequent ability to handle stress and anxiety. Testifying to this popular viewpoint, a quick search of Amazon.com in May 2007 using the term 'building self esteem' returns 3,784 books and a small number of videos, DVDs etc – it is obviously a subject of great popular interest. Yet research into the actual benefits of high levels of self esteem are not so clear cut in their findings. A recent study of self esteem and its relationship to various areas of life, including health and occupational success, reported a link between high self esteem and higher levels of happiness but that this came at a cost to those around you. The authors concluded that the benefits of high self esteem "are limited at best" (Baumeister et al, 2003 p. 37), and that it may be more useful for individuals to have accurate self knowledge, as "Although people might prefer to hold highly favorable views of themselves, accurate views would almost

certainly be more useful, insofar as accurate information is conducive to more effective decision making.” (p. 38).

This is true for most situations but is particularly pertinent for those decisions which may affect others. Thus a number of studies have been undertaken in a range of workplaces in an effort to better understand motivation and decision making at work. Harris and Schaubroeck (1988), looking at a range of studies, concluded that individual’s self ratings were generally higher than the ratings accorded them by peers or supervisors and that the correlation between self-peer and self-supervisor ratings was particularly low for managerial positions (p. 58). This was supported by Taylor and Pierce, who, in a detailed study of the effect of implementing a performance based pay agreement in a government organization, reported that most employees felt they had received a rating lower than they had expected. This does not seem to have affected their level of self esteem, with most staff blaming the discrepancy on external factors such as their supervisor, or the new appraisal system, rather than their own performance (1999, p446).

Harris and Schaubroeck also found a greater difference in correlations for those working in managerial positions, compared to blue-collar workers. The less clear cut nature of the managerial role was seen as a likely cause for this discrepancy (p. 54). As Dunning, Heath and Suls note, “people tend to believe themselves to be above average on traits that are ill defined” (p. 10). It seems that in tasks that are ambiguous, lacking clear definitions of what is good or not and with a large degree of interpretation and judgment involved, most people find it difficult to accurately assess their abilities and err on the generous side, rating their performance as above average with highly optimistic views of potential achievements. As managers, with a significant level of influence on the nature of the workplace, these attitudes can result in a poor work environment with projects not meeting their deadlines, staff overly stressed and anxious, communication problems and an overall loss of efficiency and effectiveness.

Another key finding arising from this research is the tendency to over-estimate competence exhibited by those with lesser abilities. Kruger and Dunning (1999) found that those who scored in the lowest quartile in a test were the ones who held the most exaggerated belief in their abilities. They summarised their findings thus:

We argue that when people are incompetent in the strategies they adopt to achieve success and satisfaction, they suffer a dual burden: Not only do they reach erroneous conclusions and make unfortunate choices, but their incompetence robs them of the ability to realize it (p. 1121)

This raises the concern that in such situations, individuals, being unable to recognize shortcomings in their abilities, are unlikely to seek developmental or training opportunities that would help them improve their skill and knowledge base. This results in the situation where those who should be attempting to improve their knowledge and skills in an area the most, may be the least likely to pursue such training due to misperception as to their existing abilities.

These findings, when considered in the context of management of organizations, provide a level of insight into how things go wrong, sometime spectacularly. For managers it is always going to be difficult to successfully exercise high levels of judgment and decision making in complex situations, where information may be lacking or incomplete. Couple this with the evidence that suggests they may well overestimate their ability or knowledge, and the likelihood that their decision making will be of the highest quality may be substantially compromised.

Examples abound in IT and related industries, where projects routinely fail or at the very least run over budget and time. Hamil (2003), reported results from a US survey indicating that only 16% of IT projects were completed on time and within budget, with nearly one third failing and being cancelled. He then goes on to discuss four fundamental reasons for this level of failure, concluding that the primary problem is poor project management. Other areas also exhibit similar problems, with the classic Australian example of the Sydney Opera House, originally budgeted at \$7 million and a six year time frame, it was completed (in a scaled down version) in 16 years, at a cost of \$102 million (Buehler et al 2002, in Dunning, Heath and Suls, p. 41). Library projects are also not immune, with the multimillion dollar World 1 project, a collaboration between the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand that showed so much promise in 1996 had by the middle of the following year, been abandoned (National Library of Australia, 1997).

Yet assessing appropriate levels of management skills and knowledge has always proven to be understandably difficult. There is a strong personal element involved with any assessment of managerial approaches and it has proven to be extremely difficult to link clearly improved management styles with bottom-line organizational performance (see for instance Healy and Rose, 2003, and their assessment of the impact of 360 degree feedback programs). However, a UK study did find that competency based management development programs, if tightly linked with organizational strategy, do bring business benefits and should be pursued (Winterton and Winterton, 1997, p. S75).

Despite this ambiguity in linking management training and performance, techniques such as 360 degree feedback (where managers are evaluated through feedback from their managers, peers, staff and clients) and other performance management approaches are used routinely to help improve managerial competence on the assumption this will impact positively on organizational outcomes. The basis for the 360 degree and related approaches is an understanding that supervisors alone generally see relatively little of a person's behaviour and activities at work and that to judge someone on this brief information is not a valid approach. Gathering feedback from others who probably have greater interaction with the individual should result in a more rounded picture of the manager and their job performance. This common sense understanding has led to a major take up of 360 degree or upward feedback programs within large organizations as a tool for performance evaluation.

Walker and Smither (1999) conducted an extensive five year longitudinal study of the impact of upward feedback on managerial performance (as indicated by their staff ratings). They found that manager's performance did improve over the period; that managers who received poor ratings at the beginning improved more than those with higher initial ratings; managers who held feedback sessions regarding their evaluation improved more than those who did not and that the feedback sessions were fundamental to the improvement. They conclude that what managers do with their evaluation is crucial – holding feedback sessions with staff and co-workers plays a major part in the improvement process.

In a summary of the effectiveness of 360 degree feedback, Aamodt (2000) noted that research suggests the level of agreement among raters (including subordinates) is relatively low, with the effectiveness of upward feedback very much dependent upon the attitude of the manager being appraised. In summary, it appeared that evidence of the long term effectiveness of upward feedback was at best contradictory with some studies showing definite improvements, some no change and some an actual decline in performance. Jackson (2005, p4) concluded that 360 degree feedback became more effective when it concentrated on tasks rather than management style and personal attributes.

In addition, a number of studies of the 360 degree approach have also supported the finding that there is a tendency for managers to overrate their abilities and research has indicated that subordinate feedback, which did not conform with the leader's perceptions of their competency, was viewed negatively, making the leaders "angry and discouraged" (Atwater and Brett, c2002 p14). How the feedback was presented to those being evaluated proved to be an important variable and level of commitment to the organization as a whole proved to be a powerful indicator affecting how well negative feedback was received (Atwater and Brett, p15).

Findings such as these suggest that changing managerial behaviour, as opposed to the technical skills related to management can be a difficult task. Yet more generic skills which are very much influenced by behaviours and attitudes, such as dealing with people, managing change, selling and entrepreneurship and motivating staff, are regularly sought in any survey of the training needs of library staff. A recent study of the professional development needs of staff in health and related libraries in the UK found "influencing and persuading skills" to be one of the major areas identified as a skills gap for that group (Urquhart 2005, p60). And in a world-wide training needs survey of library staff conducted by IFLA, it was found that change and innovation, leadership and marketing were the major management skills where training was required (Spies, 2003, p7). In a significant US survey of the leadership qualities desired in a new generation of academic and public library directors, the highest ranking attributes were:

- Ability to work with Boards

- Possession of integrity

- Ability to work effectively with staff

- Acting as an advocate for the library within its community and

- Ability to articulate and communicate the role of the library to its community

(Young, Powell and Hernon 2003).

Areas related to technical knowledge scored less highly than did these more personal attributes.

A more specific evaluation of the skill set and knowledge required by public library managers was developed by Mahmoodi and King (1991) with over 100 attributes listed under broad headings related to leadership, administrative abilities, technical skills, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and personal traits. Again, the balance is heavily towards personal attitudes and aptitudes rather than the more easily learnt skills and competencies.

Given this research indicating the skill and knowledge levels required of managers to lead libraries into the future, and bearing in mind the difficulties in relying upon self or subordinate evaluation in understanding existing effectiveness in many of these areas, it was decided to adopt a combined approach in ascertaining current skill levels in public library managers and where any training or development needs may exist.

Method

To obtain a better understanding of the current level of managerial skills and abilities of public library managers across Australia two separate but related survey instruments were constructed that enabled public library managers to rate themselves against a set of criteria while library staff rated their managers against the same criteria. In order to ensure anonymity and encourage 'honest' feedback, it was made clear that there would be no possibility of linking responses to individuals or their libraries. While this eliminated any possibility of identifying specific libraries who may have specific problems, it was felt that if anonymity could not be assured, for subordinates in particular assessing their manager's competence, there could be problems in obtaining a 'frank and fearless' response.

This research used the same methodology and questions as the pilot study conducted in 2004 (Pymm and Lodge, 2005) but targeted a far larger group – public library systems from all states of Australia. The surveys were distributed (electronically) from September 2005 to January 2006 via email direct to public libraries, through state library email lists for public library contacts, ALIA listserves and related groups. Instructions attached to the questionnaire encouraged library managers who may have received the survey to forward it to their staff, and similarly, staff were encouraged to contact their managers if they received the survey.

As in the pilot study, two questionnaires were used (one for completion by managers, one by staff) which had been developed from a subset of key attributes identified by Mahmoodi and King (1991) as forming a set of core managerial skills for public library managers in the 21st century. A total of 53 attributes were selected from the larger group developed by Mahmoodi and King as being those most appropriate to the Australian situation. These were grouped into five areas: leadership abilities, interpersonal abilities, administrative abilities, technical knowledge and personal traits. This fifth category, personal traits, has not been

included in the results reported below due to an isolated software error causing difficulties with the data collection. This did not affect any of the other categories. A free text question asking for any relevant comment was also appended to the questionnaire.

Obviously it was important to clearly define who should complete which survey and the words used in the pilot study, were again used in the preamble to this survey. Thus it was noted that

The definition of a manager was limited to what is commonly known in the public library community as branch managers, ie. those responsible for running an entire operation, whether it has two or twenty staff. Managers of separate areas within a particular library were deemed to be staff for the purposes of this questionnaire and asked to complete the form as a staff member commenting on their branch manager. (Pymm & Lodge 2005)

Both surveys asked the same questions but in a different manner. As an example, the staff survey asked questions such as:

*My branch manager takes initiative, ie. comes up with good ideas, pursues opportunities
My branch manager manages change well*

The manager's version asked the same question put in the first person:

*I take initiative, ie. come up with good ideas, pursue opportunities
I manage change well*

The rating scale used for all questions on the survey was as follows:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = uncertain
- 4 = agree
- 5 = strongly agree
- 0 = not applicable or not sure

The researchers acknowledged that for staff in particular, having an informed view of whether or not a manager shows initiative etc is very situational and to a large degree, open to individual interpretation. This was one of the main reasons for undertaking this broader study in the hope that with much larger numbers of respondents, the findings could be seen as more valid than those drawn from the small pilot study conducted earlier. In order to try and reduce the impact of staff making wild guesses from uninformed positions, the staff survey asked that it be completed only by those who had worked for six months or more with that manager.

Results

A total of 223 surveys were completed and returned electronically. 85 were completed by managers, 138 by staff. Around 30 contained free text comment – sometimes quite in-depth. These comments will not be discussed in this paper but reported elsewhere.

As the surveys were anonymous it is not possible to assess whether these came from a broad range of public libraries across the country or were focused in a small number of areas. The relatively large number of managers' responses compared to staff responses suggests that managers felt more comfortable in completing the survey. It may also indicate that the staff who did complete the survey felt more strongly about certain aspects of their manager's performance than those who did not respond. This suggests a potential lack of randomness in the sample, reducing the level of confidence with which the survey findings can be applied to the broader population of public library managers and staff. The results from this survey were also compared to those from the pilot survey in order to see if the trends indicated in the first survey were replicated in this more wide-ranging sample.

In calculating totals for the mean and standard deviation, responses scoring "0" (not applicable or unsure) were not included in the calculations.

Table 1 below provides a broad overview of the results from the four categories successfully surveyed for both managers and staff. The Pilot Study results are shown in brackets, in grey.

	Mgr Mean	Mgr std dv	Staff Mean	Staff std dv
Leadership	4.12 (4.14)	0.33 (0.34)	3.49 (3.60)	0.29 (0.42)
Administrative abilities	4.13 (4.04)	0.12 (0.25)	3.60 (3.54)	0.14 (0.30)
Technical skills	4.32 (4.22)	0.26 (0.48)	4.02 (3.97)	0.20 (0.31)
Interpersonal skills	4.11 (4.09)	0.31 (0.34)	3.55 (3.39)	0.31 (0.48)

Table 1 – overall scores for each of the categories – current and pilot

Using a two tailed test, the null hypothesis that there is no difference between managers and staff responses can be shown as $H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$

The alternative hypothesis is $H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$

Using a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$; $Z_{\alpha/2} = \pm 1.96$

From the current survey $n_1 = 85$ (total number of manager responses)
 $n_2 = 138$ (total number of staff responses)

And using means and standard deviations for each of the four categories as shown in Table 1, tests for the significance or not of the difference between the two groups show:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Leadership} \quad \text{Actual Z} &= 4.12 - 3.49 / \sqrt{((0.33)^2/85) + ((0.29)^2/138)} \\ &= 0.63 / 0.0435 &= \mathbf{14.48} \end{aligned}$$

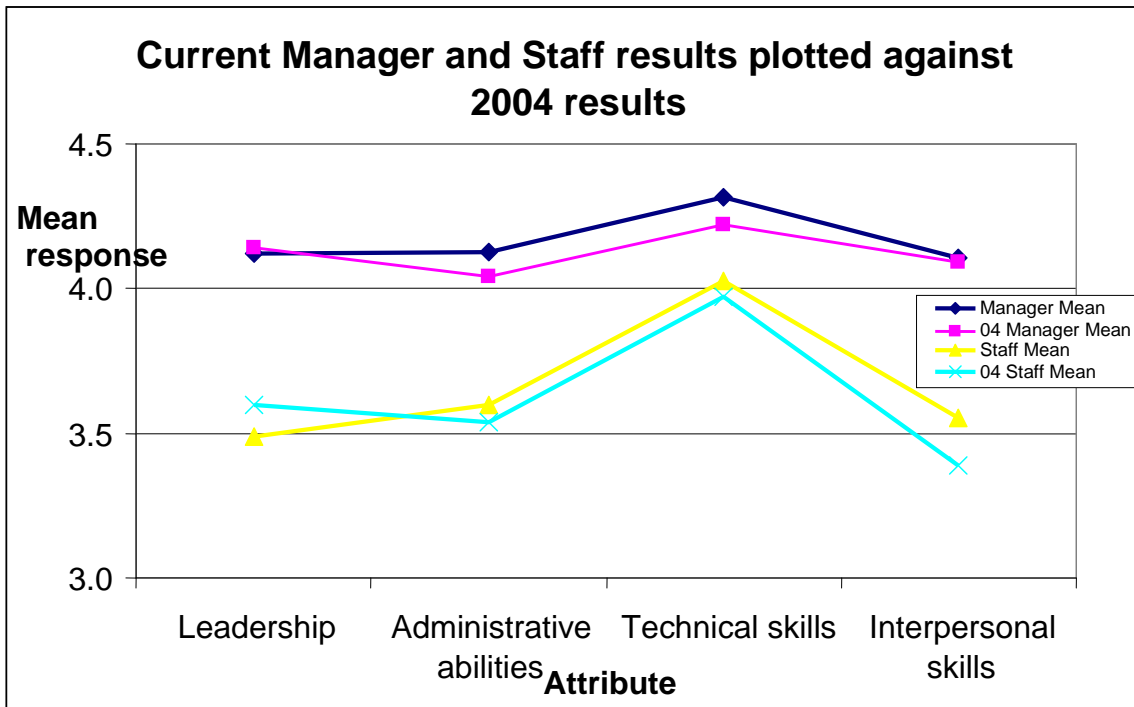
$$\begin{aligned} \text{Administrative ability} \quad \text{Actual Z} &= 4.13 - 3.60 / \sqrt{((0.12)^2/85) + ((0.14)^2/138)} \\ &= 0.53 / 0.0176 &= \mathbf{30.11} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Technical skills} \quad \text{Actual Z} &= 4.32 - 4.02 / \sqrt{((0.26)^2/85) + ((0.20)^2/138)} \\ &= 0.30 / 0.033 &= \mathbf{9.09} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Interpersonal skills} \quad \text{Actual Z} &= 4.11 - 3.55 / \sqrt{((0.31)^2/85) + ((0.31)^2/138)} \\ &= 0.56 / 0.042 &= \mathbf{13.33} \end{aligned}$$

All of these scores are greater than 1.96 with the result that the null hypothesis that there is no difference between them can be rejected and it can be concluded that there are significant differences in responses at the 5% level of confidence.

The results shown in Table 1 follow closely the results obtained in the earlier pilot study. The basic trends are consistent across both sets of results. This is illustrated in the graph below.



The top 10 questions with the greatest difference in result when the branch managers are compared against the staff are as follows (note that the wording for the questions in all of the tables below is taken from the staff survey although managers would have answered a questions starting “I”):

Question	Attribute	Mgr Mean	Staff Mean	Diff
My branch manager is aware of how their own behaviour affects others	INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	4.51	3.22	1.29
My branch manager values and respects the ideas of others	LEADERSHIP	4.48	3.53	0.94
My branch manager maintains a high profile at work and is always ready to be involved	LEADERSHIP	4.49	3.61	0.88

My branch manager usually makes decisions in an appropriate time frame	LEADERSHIP	4.28	3.40	0.88
My branch manager demonstrates respect and confidence in the team	LEADERSHIP	4.27	3.42	0.84
My branch manager is active in building an effective team environment	LEADERSHIP	4.20	3.41	0.79
My branch manager provides constructive feedback	INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	4.20	3.41	0.79
My branch manager demonstrates trust in staff	INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	4.50	3.73	0.77
My branch manager helps others manage change well	LEADERSHIP	3.79	3.04	0.75
My branch manager feeds back information from senior management meetings to all staff	ADMINISTRATIVE ABILITIES	4.23	3.49	0.74

Other significant points from each category are outlined below. The two questions scored most highly by managers are shown, followed by those scored the lowest by managers. This is repeated for staff scores and finally, the two questions with the largest difference in rating between staff and management are shown.

Leadership

	Question	Mgrs mean	Staff mean	Diff
High score MGR	My branch manager promotes the library in the wider community	4.51	3.78	0.73
	My branch manager takes staff development seriously	4.51	3.77	0.74
Low score MGR	My branch manager has the ability to influence senior management	3.62	3.32	0.30
	My branch manager is a risk taker	3.57	3.06	0.51

High score STF	My branch manager takes initiative, ie. comes up with good ideas, pursues opportunities	4.40	3.99	0.41
	My branch manager has a strong influence on the library's culture	4.35	3.97	0.38
Low score STF	My branch manager is a risk taker	3.57	3.06	0.51
	My branch manager helps others manage change well	3.79	3.04	0.75
Highest difference	My branch manager values and respects the ideas of others	4.48	3.53	0.94
	My branch manager maintains a high profile at work and is always ready to be involved	4.49	3.61	0.88
Lowest difference	My branch manager delegates effectively	3.77	3.42	0.34
	My branch manager has the ability to influence senior management	3.62	3.32	0.30

Overall means across all questions in the Leadership sector:

Managers	4.12
Staff	3.49
Difference	0.63

Administrative abilities

	Question	Mgrs mean	Staff mean	Diff
High score MGR	My branch manager argues for increased resources	4.27	3.85	0.42
	My branch manager holds regular staff meetings	4.23	3.78	0.45
Low score MGR	My branch manager ensures staff understand their role in achieving the bigger, strategic goals of the library	4.01	3.45	0.56
	My branch manager develops and communicates policies and procedures	3.95	3.54	0.41
High score STF	My branch manager argues for increased resources	4.27	3.85	0.42
	My branch manager holds regular staff meetings	4.23	3.78	0.45
Low score STF	My branch manager feeds back information from senior management meetings to all staff	4.23	3.49	0.74
	My branch manager ensures staff understand their role in achieving the bigger, strategic goals of the library	4.01	3.45	0.56
Highest difference	My branch manager feeds back information from senior management meetings to all staff	4.23	3.49	0.74
	My branch manager manages staff meetings to ensure all staff can participate and that ideas and/or concerns flow freely	4.20	3.54	0.66

Interpersonal skills

	Question	Mgrs mean	Staff mean	Diff
High score MGR	My branch manager is aware of how their own behaviour affects others	4.51	3.22	1.29
	My branch manager demonstrates trust in staff	4.50	3.73	0.77
Low score MGR	My branch manager confronts and manages conflict	3.65	3.15	0.50
	My branch manager is good at handling difficult staff	3.56	3.12	0.44
High score STF	My branch manager projects a professional manner	4.27	3.94	0.33
	My branch manager demonstrates confidence in self and others	4.26	3.89	0.37
Low score STF	My branch manager confronts and manages conflict	3.65	3.15	0.50
	My branch manager is good at handling difficult staff	3.56	3.12	0.44
Highest difference	My branch manager is aware of how their own behaviour affects others	4.51	3.22	1.29
	My branch manager provides constructive feedback	4.20	3.41	0.79
Lowest difference	My branch manager is good at handling difficult users	4.09	3.82	0.27
	My branch manager is an effective speaker and presenter	3.91	3.87	0.04

Overall means across all questions in the Interpersonal sector:

Managers	4.11
Staff	3.55
Difference	0.56

Discussion

As can be seen in the summary figures above, for each category, managers rated their ability or knowledge at a statistically significant higher level than was perceived by staff, confirming the findings of previous research, including the pilot study. Overall, manager's ratings were highly consistent, with mean scores in a range of 4.11 to a high of 4.32 across all categories. Staff showed a somewhat wider range with means between 3.49 and 4.02, perhaps reflecting the wider range of staff experience, levels and backgrounds for those completing the questionnaire.

The leadership category showed the largest disparity between overall management and staff scores, closely followed by interpersonal skills and administrative abilities. Of the top 10 questions ordered by the magnitude of the difference between ratings, the first nine were from the leadership or interpersonal skills categories, number ten from administrative abilities. Again, this reinforces previous findings that it is in these more generic skills, largely people oriented, that managers are perceived differently by staff compared to how they see themselves.

Managers reported a high level of awareness as to how their behaviour in the workplace affected others (rating themselves 4.51) but this was not seen by staff who rated this aspect of their manager's behaviour a low 3.22. This significant mismatch of perceptions on such a fundamental criterion suggests problems with communication within the working environment and a lack of understanding by managers on how their day-to-day approach, attitudes and actions in the workplace are seen by their staff. While managers may think they are closely involved and leading in a positive manner, it may be that in many situations, their behaviour and the rationale behind it is not clear to staff with resultant dissatisfaction and lack of motivation within the team. Related to this, virtually all of the remaining nine questions where the gap between managers and staff ratings was the largest reflected issues to do with the manager and their interaction with the team. Thus, while managers felt they valued the ideas of others, showed respect and confidence in staff and were active in team building, staff were less positive. That there should be a difference is no surprise – both groups will have some inbuilt reference points and biases that come with the positions they occupy. It is the significance of the difference, the size of the gap, that is important and raises questions as to its impact on team motivation, productivity and overall effectiveness for the organization.

The leadership category showed managers rating themselves highly on the promotional aspects of their role – maintaining the name and image of the library - and also on their commitment to staff development. They were less sure on their ability to influence senior management (a view shared by staff as well) and their attitude to risk taking – again, a view shared by staff. These last two viewpoints support the stereotypical view of the profession – that it is low risk with limited power to influence things. It is difficult to know whether this perception has affected responses or whether the individual situation is being accurately described. In contrast, staff saw managers as having a strong influence on the culture of the library itself and also rated their managers highly on the related issue of taking initiative. Thus generally there was a belief that within the library environment managers were proactive and did influence things – externally staff and managers were less sure.

Views on administrative abilities were slightly less divergent with both managers and staff giving top scores to the questions on managers arguing for extra resources and their holding of regular staff meetings. That both agreed on the importance of the manager's role in working for extra resources suggests that this is seen as a well established part of any manager's job and that both staff and managers agree that overall they do work towards this. Holding regular staff meetings appears to be an established practice both agree on but the perceived effectiveness of such meetings is mitigated by the low scores given by staff to the

questions regarding the provision of information from senior management to all staff and the communication of the big picture, strategic goals of the library. Thus while meetings are being held it seems that the communication of important higher level information is not seen as being delivered as well as it might.

Technical skills were the area where the difference in scores was notably lower than any of the other categories. This clearly reflects the findings of the pilot study and reinforces the viewpoint that in such areas, it is probably easier to assess your own level of competence in a fairly objective manner and also easier for others to do so. While there was still a statistically significant difference between the scores overall for this category, it was much smaller than the other areas with no question scoring a manager-staff gap larger than 0.47. That managers saw themselves, and were generally seen, as having a good understanding of the usual library functions is possibly a reflection of the manner in which most public library managers move into the role – they are promoted after experience at lower levels where they would have been involved with these functions in a hands-on manner. Two areas rated lowly by both staff and managers were those asking about knowledge of copyright and related legal issues and the question of regular meetings with other public library managers. With the increasingly complicated rights environment that has emerged with the growth of digital materials, it would seem that professional development in this area has lagged behind with both staff and managers aware of their limited knowledge, or lack of confidence, in this area. The more straight forward issue of regular meetings with peers would appear to be more of an organizational issue, requiring a level of strategic direction from senior management. With the growth of a range of consortia and other cooperative ventures it would seem that building relationships with other managers within and beyond the specific library system could provide significant benefits both to the individual and to the library itself.

Some of the differences raised in the interpersonal skills category have already been discussed. One area of similarity, which again reflects the results of the pilot study, is that both managers and staff gave low scores for the questions dealing with difficult staff and managing conflict. For managers, the question relating to difficult staff scored the lowest of the entire questionnaire; staff rated it in their bottom five. The question regarding conflict more generally also scored close to the bottom for both groups. This result clearly reflects the difficulties or concerns that many managers have in effectively handling challenging staffing situations. It also reflects a level of staff dissatisfaction in the way this is done. For managers, such a low score suggests there is a significant need for professional development in this area in order to build a skill base, and the confidence to put it into action, for dealing with such situations effectively. The reasons for the low staff rating could be many but it is likely that one consideration is the feeling from staff that generally, they want managers to make the hard decisions and deal with these difficult interpersonal issues. As one respondent commented “it’s their job, it’s what they are paid to do”.

Conclusion

The nature of a self administered survey, sent to a potentially wide set of respondents and reliant upon individual interest or motivation to complete is always going to pose difficulties when evaluating the results. When such a survey also asks for opinions and evaluation then it does mean that at the very best, the information obtained can only be indicative rather than proscriptive. However, the scale of this survey, with over 220 respondents, the statistical strength of the differences shown and its similarity with results obtained from the earlier pilot study does, the researchers believe, provide a level of confidence that the results are indeed indicative of the situation in the wider public library community.

The results confirm that there is a difference between manager's self ratings and those given by staff. This difference, for every one of the questions reported was in one direction only – manager's always rated themselves more highly against a criterion than did staff. The criteria where the differences were largest related to interpersonal type skills, including the impact of the manager's behaviour on the workplace generally, communications skills, team motivation, feedback and the ability to manage difficult people. On the technical side, there is a need for greater understanding of copyright and related legal issues. These findings suggest that professional development activities focused on these areas should be a priority for training providers for the public library sector.

References

- Aamodt, Mike (2000). *Technical Affairs*. Available at <http://www.ipmaac.org/acn/jun00/techaff.html>
Viewed 5 August 2005
- Atwater, Leanne and Brett, Joan F (c2002). *Antecedents and Consequences of Reactions to 360-degree feedback*. Available at: http://shrm.org/foundation/atwater_fulltext.pdf
Viewed 3 August 2005
- Bandura, Albert (1994). *Self-efficacy*. Available at <http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/BanEncy.html>
Viewed 27 July 2005.
- Baumeister, Roy F, Campbell, Jennifer D., Krueger, Joachim I and Vohs, Kathleen D. (2003). Does high self esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles? *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 4 (1), pp. 1-44. Available at <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/journals/pspi/pdf/pspi411.pdf>
Viewed May 2007.
- Dunning, David, Heath, Chip and Suls, Jerry (2004). Flawed self-assessment: implications for health, education, and the workplace *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 5 (3), pp. 1-71
Available at: <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1529-1006.2004.00018.x>
Viewed May 2007.
- Greening, Leilani and Chandler, Carla C. (1997). Why It Can't Happen to Me: The Base Rate Matters, But Overestimating Skill Leads to Underestimating Risk. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 27 (9), pp.760.
- Hamil, David L (2003). Your mission should you choose to accept it: project management excellence.. Available at: <http://www.nlwra.gov.au/toolkit/6/6-2.html>
Viewed May 2007.
- Harris, Michael M. and Schaubroeck, John (1988). A meta-analysis of self-supervisor, self-peer and peer-supervisor ratings. *Personnel Psychology*, 41, pp. 43-62.
- Healy, M. C., & Rose, D. S. (2003). Validation of a 360-degree feedback

instrument against sales: Content matters. Interactive poster session presented at the *18th annual conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Orlando, Florida*.

Available at: <http://www.3dgroup.org/TR8202.pdf>

Viewed 27 July 2005.

Jackson, H (2005). *Performance measurement and evaluation*. Available at:

<http://www.psych.umn.edu/courses/spring05/jacksonh/psy3711/lectures/lecture%207a-%20performance%20appraisal%203-1-05%20for%20web%203%20slides.pdf>

Viewed 5 August 2005.

Kruger, Justin and Dunning, David (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. pp1121-1134.

Mahmoodi, Suzanne H and King, Geraldine (1991). *Identifying Competencies and Responsibilities of Top Management Teams in Public Libraries, Minnesota Libraries 30* (autumn/ winter 1991–92): 26–32. Available at:

<http://www.arrowhead.lib.mn.us/renewal/top.htm>

Viewed 5 August 2005

National Library of Australia (1997). 37th Annual Report, 1996-1997. Available at:

<http://www.nla.gov.au/policy/annrep97/dgrev.html>

Viewed may 2007.

Pymm, Bob and Lodge, Damien (2005). *Can evidence based research methods assist library managers in becoming better managers?* Paper presented at the 3rd International Evidence Based Librarianship Conference, Brisbane October.

Available at:

<http://conferences.alia.org.au/eb12005/Pymm.pdf>

Viewed 1 May 2007

Radhakrishnan, Phanikiran, Arrow, Holly and Janet A. Sniezek (1996). Hoping, performing, learning, and predicting: changes in the accuracy of self-evaluations of performance. *Human Performance*, 9 (1), pp23-49. Available at:

http://www.leaonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15327043hup0901_2

Viewed 1 May 2007

Smither, James, Walker, Alan, Yap, Michael (February 2004). An examination of the equivalence of web-based versus paper-and-pencil upward feedback ratings: rater and ratee level analyses, *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 64 (1), pp40-61.

Available at:

<http://epm.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/64/1/40.pdf>

Viewed 4 August 2005

- Spies, Phyllis B (2003). Report on the Results of a Global Web-based Survey of Continuing Education and Training Needs of Library Staff. Paper presented at the 69th IFLA General Conference and Assembly, Berlin. Available at: <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/014e-Spies.pdf>
Viewed 4 August 2005.
- Taylor, Paul J and Pierce, Jon. Effects of Introducing a performance management system on employees' subsequent attitudes and effort. *Public Personnel Management*, pp423-452. Available at: http://www.ipma-hr.org/newsfiles/1999_3_taylor.pdf
Viewed 3 August 2005.
- Urquhart, Christine, Spink, Sian and Rhian Thomas (2005). *Assessing training and professional development needs of library staff*. Available at: http://www.library.nhs.uk/forLibrarians/nlh_cpd_report100505.doc
Viewed 4 August 2005
- Walker, Alan G. and Smither, James W. (1999). A Five Year Study of Upward Feedback: What Managers do with their Results Matters. *Personnel Psychology*, v52 n2, pp. 393-423.
- Winterton, Jonathan and Winterton, Ruth (1997). Does Management Development add Value? *British Journal of Management*, 8, Special Issue, pp. 65-76.
- Young, Arthur, Powell, Ronald and Hernon, Peter (2003). Attributes of the next generation of library directors. Paper presented at the *ACRL Eleventh National Conference, Charlotte, North Carolina*. Available at: <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlevents/hernon.pdf>
Viewed 5 August 2005