Providing Continuing Education to Employees:
An Examination of the Multiple Factors Involved

Emily Brown

San Jose State University

Author Note:

Emily Brown, School of Library and Information Science, San Jose State University.
Correspondence regarding this paper should be addressed to EmilyE.Brown at gmail.com.

Abstract

This paper discusses the many aspects of continuing education. The common methods used in continuing education and the differences between them. The importance of maintaining educational growth in library and information science (LIS) careers and how specialized knowledge effects professional competency. The reasons that continuing educational opportunities are not fully utilized and ways to fix that situation. Professions that are dependent on continuing education due to growing technological use are explored, with a focus on LIS professionals. The effects of demographic differences on utilizing continuing education in academic libraries. Continuing education opportunities have a strong effect on the retention of LIS employees.

Providing Continuing Education to Employees: An Examination of the Multiple Factors Involved

Many companies provide their employees with opportunities to continue their education. This includes formal and informal mentorships, conferences, workshops, and classes both in person and online. However, there are many reasons why these continued education opportunities are not fully utilized such as lack of time, financial concerns, lack of flexible classes, and lack of useful topics. Many professions are highly dependent on continuing education to maintain up-to-date knowledge and skills and thereby maintain or advance careers. Librarians are one such profession and they face similar issues concerning continuing education but with slightly different circumstances.

Methods of continuing education vary widely. The traditional day long, in person college credit classes were often found to be unusable or impractical by working students. Brandt (2002) explores several different strategies for continuing education in Norway from the universities perspective. One strategy is to develop short non-credit courses designed for updating professionals that is based on research in that particular university department. For example, a short non-credit class for teachers may be offered . Another strategy is to offer the same credit course but with more flexible delivery. An example would be taking the credit course part time, in a distance education method, such as online, or weekend courses. The universities may decide to take graduate courses and adapt them in content and delivery mode for professionals as another strategy. Offering interdisciplinary graduate courses towards a Master's degree is an additional strategy employed by universities. Another strategy employed by the universities is to develop interdisciplinary credit courses for target groups. Some of these courses are developed on commission, some are developed in response to regional issues identified in a particular profession. The final strategy that Brandt (2002) identified is to collaborate with a customer, usually an employer that wants a course for a number of employees, and develop commissioned continuing education. For example, a computer science course was developed for an insurance company. Brandt (2002) found that while distance education is not part of all of the strategies mentioned above, interdisciplinary courses usually are, due to the nature of

professional fields like management. Alternative delivery methods also include evening, intensive daytime, weekend and summer courses for flexibility.

        Continuing education is an important aspect of professional growth. Khalid (2011) discusses the need of continuous growth of specialized knowledge, especially in the field of library and information science (LIS) professionals. Specialized knowledge comes from knowledge, training and experience and creates the competency needed for professionals to do their job adequately.   The changing requirements of today's technological emphasized society mean that truly effective performance of LIS professionals require updates of their specialized knowledge. Khalid 2011) discusses how important specialized knowledge is to professionals by giving them the ability to provide specialized, good quality services. Continuous education is an important part of developing up-to-date specialized knowledge, and meeting the challenging needs of professionals. Several contributors have a role in developing and broadening specialized knowledge. Library schools should keep their curricula relevant to the changing needs, and focus on computer skills as well as communication. Libraries, professional associations, research groups and individuals, government agencies, and media agencies are also contributors. The need for competency and specialized knowledge in LIS professionals in order for them to meet the growing needs of society.

        Reasons why continued education is not being utilized fully can be a complex issue. Park, Tosaka, Maszaros, and Lu (2010) discuss the lack of quality classes in desired topic, such as metadata quality, and other continuing education needs among LIS professionals. Specifically, the continuing education needs of cataloging and metadata professionals. In the metadata environment, Park et al (2010) found that the rapid growth of new metadata standards and technology create an increased demand for continuing education that is not being fully met. There is a high level of interest in keeping knowledge and skills up-to-date, however Park et al (2010) identified six main obstacles to continuing education. These include: lack of time, lack of financial resource, difficulty in traveling for face-to-face training, lack of training/continuing professional development opportunities, lack of support from employer, and lack of online resources. The other obstacles identified by Park et al (2010) indicated a lack of practical application of what is learned in workshops and the like, to real on-the-job projects, such as metadata quality control and management practices. This gap in what is needed by the professionals and what is currently being offered is a main reason why continuing education is not being completely employed.

        The types of professions dependent on continuing education are careers like librarians, engineers, and other technology related fields. Ritchie, Hallam, Hamill, Lewis, Foti, O'Connor and Clark (2010) discusses the future continuing education needs of health librarians in Australia. The health care field is a rapidly changing one, and information professionals need to possess current knowledge on how to manage the technology which runs the new systems which are being implemented. New electronic patient records, the growing number of aging patients, and the increased need for research support and teaching roles mean that health librarians have

new duties to take on. Ritchie et al (2010) discusses how the field of healthcare is changing, and that health librarians will need to develop new roles and skills in addition to their existing roles. Their survey of health librarians across Australia provided them with a great deal of information. Many librarians are persuading re-education on the job and through more traditional coursework. Ritchie et al (2010) research revealed that many health librarians had a strong commitment to continuing professional development. Looking to future needs, any ongoing professional development program should include both generalist and specialist skills. Many of the health librarians mentioned by Ritchie et al (2010) are working in small libraries that are geographically isolated. Online courses are one potential way of meeting these important needs. The design of online courses should focus on the quality of the learners' experience which relates to course presentation and design, flexibility, peer communication, support and knowledge validation.

Librarians specifically face several issues due to the demographics of the profession. Damasco & Hodges (2012) discusses continuing education from the perspective of gaining tenure and promotions in academic libraries by librarians of color in the United States. Damasco & Hodges (2012) talks about the current demographic landscape of librarians, being mainly white and the majority female. Their article examines the difficulties and struggles of librarians of color. Damasco & Hodges (2012) surveyed a number of librarians of color working in academic libraries. The feedback regarding the participants perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of professional development programs such as formal mentoring, informal mentoring, funding continuing education opportunities such as workshops and conferences, funding leadership opportunities such as career development programs, peer support groups, and workshops on research methods and publication writing. The majority of respondents rated that funding continuing education opportunities was the most important, with the others closely rated behind funding continuing education. The actual effectiveness of existing professional development programs was rated separately. A large number of respondents found that funding for continued education was effective. Damasco and Hodges (2012) acknowledges that while external opportunities for professional development are available to librarians, they are not always easily accessible.

There is increased employee retention and productivity among institutions that support continuing education. Musser (2001) discusses retention strategies in her article which the American Management Association's survey of the best retention practices. The findings are by percentage, and can be sorted into the following six categories: mentoring, networking, career and learning opportunities, interesting work, good benefits, and balance between work and home life. Focusing on the career and learning opportunities the survey mentions the following sections being over 50% important, in descending order: external conferences, managerial training, tuition reimbursement, support for degree, pay for performance, flexible work arrangements, interpersonal skills training, and technical training. Of these eight categories rated over 50%, only one is not related to the category of career and learning opportunities. Musser (2001) concludes that a strong influential factor for retention is career and learning opportunities.

To sum, continuing education is an important part of employee retention, and career advancement. Some fields, like library and information science, have greater requirements in

continuing education. The growth of additional roles due to the advancement of technology being utilized means that more and more librarians across the globe are finding continuing education necessary for maintaining appropriate level of specialized knowledge that is required in the job. However, the methods of receiving continuing education vary wildly. Flexibility and quality courses are two important factors in designing continuing education courses. Despite the availability of continuing education opportunities, some professionals are unable to take advantage of them due to a number of reasons. Paramount among these is the lack of time, money or quality courses. Regardless of difficulties, it is clear that continuing education is an important aspect of both maintaining specialized skills that are becoming more and more important in technologically dependent fields like library and information science as well as for employers to retain quality employees.

References

Brandt, E. (2002). Strategies by Norwegian universities to meet diversified market demands for continuing education. *Higher Education*, 44(3/4), pp. 393-411.

Damasco, I., & Hodges, D. (2012). Tenure and Promotion Experiences of Academic Librarians of Color. *College & Research Libraries*, *73*(3), 279-301.

Khalid, H. M. (2011). The Role of Specialized Knowledge for the Development of Professional Competency—The Case of LIS. Pakistan Library & Information Science Journal, 42(2), 13-16.

Musser, L. R. (2001). Effective retention strategies for diverse employees. *Journal Of Library Administration*, *33*(1/2), 63-72.

Park, J., Tosaka, Y., Maszaros, S., & Lu, C. (2010). From Metadata Creation to Metadata Quality Control: Continuing Education Needs Among Cataloging and Metadata

Professionals. *Journal Of Education For Library & Information Science*, 51(3), 158-176.

Ritchie, A., Hallam, G., Hamill, C. C., Lewis, S. S., Foti, M. M., O'Connor, P. P., & Clark, C. C. (2010). Designing a specialist postgraduate qualification and continuing professional development structure for the health librarian workforce of the future. Australian Academic & Research Libraries, 41(4), 276-299.