

Strategies to Build a New Human Resources Paradigm in the Mexican Public Libraries

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“The great transformations come by breaking the old ways of thinking. When the paradigm is changed, a whole new area of psychological wisdom, knowledge and understanding is opened...” -- Stephen R. Covey. *Principle-centered Leadership* ¹

THE CURRENT PARADIGM

Robert D. Stueart and Barbara B. Moran mention, in the chapter on Staffing, in their book *Library and Information Center Management*:

“A library can have an outstanding collection of print and electronic materials, access to a wealth of online resources, cutting-edge automated systems, and an award-winning building, but if it does not have a well-trained, competent staff, the patrons using the library will not be served effectively.”²

This quote applies for the American reality where public libraries have achieved a high level of development, where the majority of its personnel holds a master degree in library science (the science of libraries and information centers), and still it is emphasized that information resources, information technology, or buildings, are not the most important factors to serve patrons effectively, but human resources, to have a well trained and competent staff.

And what would the Mexican reality be, where its libraries have in general poor information resources, scarce information technology, small and inadequate buildings,

¹ Covey, Stephen R. *El Liderazgo centrado en principios*. México: Paidós Mexicana, S.A., 1993, Capítulo: “Cómo Cambiar su Paradigma Gerencial,” p. 233.

² Stueart, Robert D. y Moran, Barbara B. *Library and Information Center Management*. 5a. ed. Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1998, p. 163.

and where the lowest minority of its personnel hardly holds a university degree, where it is seldom who has an undergraduate or graduate degree in library science? This question has several paths of answer, but the part where are interested in is on human resources.

This is a brief panorama of literature dealing with the development of human resources in public libraries. We found some recommendations in the paper "Present and Future Vision of Public and School Libraries before the Reading Habit" by Martha Delia Castro Montoya at the 2001 annual Mexican Conference of Librarianship:

- "To hire a higher number of personnel that must have a better academic training.
- To establish different categories for the staff who work in the library according with their academic training and experience, these categories should be the base for a salary tabulator as well."³

Undoubtely the General Direction of Libraries (Dirección General de Bibliotecas), since the beginning of the Public Libraries National Network (Red Nacional de Bibliotecas), is the developer of the most solid and steady program of training for librarians in the country. Nevertheless, it has it deficiencies as they themselves acknowledge it:

- "A study carried on precisely in Latin America found these human resources problems:
- Lack of personnel with undergraduate or graduate degrees in library science.
 - Concentration of personnel in the big cities.
 - Lack of training for the non professional staff.
 - Continuous lost of financing resources dedicated to training programs due to the high rotation of non professional staff.
 - Lack of acquaintance of the basic policies of selection of personnel, since when staffing takes place due to political reasons, rather than university or practical training.

These problems are present in Mexico too."⁴

As for the literature reviewed, the human resources problems are quite clear, and although some intentions of solutions have been proposed over the years, it is hardly to find how these solutions would be implemented. This brings us to our fundamental thesis: it is our advocacy for the traditional paradigm what does not allow us to see public libraries with new eyes, with a new face, with a new body.

BUILDING THE NEW PARADIGM

The time has come to bury the old paradigm and build a new one to be able to see the new era of the Mexican public libraries. The current paradigm has demonstrated that it is not possible to have a solid and steady development meeting the most minimal international standards of library science; it is a poor and obsolete paradigm. Only with a true change of our mental structures it is how we will be prepared to make a qualitative leap towards a better national library reality that it is indeed possible to build despite the governing underdevelopment conditions of our country.

³ Castro Montoya, Martha Delia. "Presente y vision future de las bibliotecas públicas y escolares frente al hábito lector." En Memoria de las Jornadas Mexicanas de Biblioteconomía, del 2 al 4 de mayo de 2001, Jalapa, Veracruz, p. 343

⁴ MEXICO. SEP. CONACULTA. *Memoria del Primer Encuentro Internacional sobre Bibliotecas Púlicas: Perspectivas en México para el Siglo XXI*, Ciudad de México, del 24 al 28 de septiembre de 2001. México: CONACULTA/ Dirección General de Bibliotecas, "Mesa Redonda sobre Recursos Humanos" (Colección "Biblioteca del Bibliotecario"), 2001, p. 214-5.
<http://web.archive.org/web/20020405122650/http://www.goethe.de/hn/mex/biblpubl.htm> ;
<http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00013414/01/2001.1erEIBP.Mexico.Memorias.pdf>

In the current literature we find some studies that propose the building of this new paradigm of human resources in the Mexican public libraries. An example of this is the paper of Zapopan Martín Muela Meza: "Let Us Really Promote the Development of the Mexican Public Libraries" in the First Nacional Congreso of Public Libraries, June 11-13, 2001 in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico. He proposes Colegio Nacional de Bibliotecarios (CNB, National College of Librarians, the national association of librarians with an undergraduate or graduate degree in library science) or Asociación Mexicana de Bibliotecarios (AMBAC, the Mexican Library Association) some points that they should standardize and advocate for the training and payment staff in public libraries:

- "Academic training of personnel in library science.
- Directive positions in charge of librarians with library science undergraduate or graduate degrees.
- Competitive wages."⁵

As for the professional development of personnel in public libraries he proposes:

"To fight for the government at all levels –with the participation of public and private universities, corporations and international organisms—under the surveillance of the AMBAC and/or the CNB or another library associations, favor public librarians with some of these initiatives:

- To obtain grants to become members of AMBAC.
- To obtain financial resources so a higher number of public librarians can attend every year the AMBAC annual conference.
- To set a plan with a steady increase of salaries."⁶

These approaches tend to change the current state of things that prevail on human resources, but they have just stayed as mere nice proposals and dreams, since the library associations are still not convinced of their importance and the government bodies have not taken them into consideration.

A more concrete proposal on the academic and practical training of public librarians is the one of CNB through Lina Escalona Ríos,⁷ its current president, in her participation in the round table on human resources in the First International Congress of Public Library in Mexico City, September 24-28, 2001. In her paper "Training of Human Resources in Public Libraries" she proposes the implementation of a program for the training of public librarians distinguishing two categories:

⁵ Muela-Meza, Zapopan Martín (2001) Let us really promote the development of the Mexican public libraries. *Library Juice* 4(25).. Consulted online, 25/8/02, <http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00004746/>

⁶ ibidem

⁷ Escalona Ríos, Lina. "Formación de recursos humanos en bibliotecas públicas." En MEXICO. SEP. CONACULTA. *Memoria del Primer Encuentro Internacional sobre Bibliotecas Púlicas: Perspectivas en México para el Siglo XXI*, Ciudad de México, del 24 al 28 de septiembre de 2001. Consultada en línea, 28 de octubre del 2001, <http://web.archive.org/web/20020405122650/http://www.goethe.de/hn/mex/biblpubl.htm> ; <http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00013414/01/2001.1erEIBP.Mexico.Memorias.pdf>

professional and non professional staff, where the first should have library science training in universities and the second practical training in librarianship. She acknowledges the importance of the practical training that the Dirección General de Bibliotecas (General Direction of Libraries, the centralized organism that coordinates the whole national network of 6, 200 public libraries), but mentions that it is insufficient, so technical and lacking of theoretical contents.

She suggests the contents for the academic and practical training in library science. She also notes that a preliminary study should be run as to know the current educational profile of all the personnel in the whole national network and be able to structure the training program mentioned. She suggests that the current library schools in Mexico City, Chiapas, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí and the Estado de México are the national leaders which should support this program and as for the rest of the states she thinks the Distance Learning Program (by regular postal mail, not with information technologies) of the Escuela Nacional de Biblioteconomía y Archivistomía (ENBA from the federal Secretary of Public Education in Mexico City) could be the best choice to deliver undergraduate studies and degrees.

A year has passed and neither CNB, nor Dirección General de Bibliotecas has carried on such a basic educational profile study for the implementation of the training program she proposed. And yet, in the best of the circumstances that this program could be implemented, there is no guarantee for its success, since the high rotation of personnel in the municipal public libraries is what affects the continuity of any program and therefore its development overall.

With this analysis, it is necessary to take a step forward beyond these limits. It is necessary to search for new schemes in benefit of the public libraries, it is necessary to transform the current paradigm and build a new one. These are some strategies to build a new human resources paradigm in the Mexican public libraries:

1. The federal government instead of trying to open more libraries which do not meet the minimal international library standards, it should improve the current ones. This could be done by providing them financial donations so they can redesign and extend their buildings, to buy furniture, computer equipment and library materials.
2. The General Libraries Act (Ley General de Bibliotecas) should be reformed in such a way that the financial resources for the construction, implementation, equipment and daily maintaining of libraries should be paid proportionally by the three instances of government: federal, state and municipal, since the municipalities carry the biggest budgetary burden, and therefore librarians pay these consequences of being paid the lowest wages (the average salary of a Mexican public librarian per month is between \$ 100.00 and \$ 200.00 US dollars).
3. The federal government in coordination with the states and municipalities could evaluate the creation of a new public library institution with a structure similar to the one of school teachers. This initiative has not documented background in the literature reviewed and it would require further research, but it could include this:
 - a. The construction and implementation of library science schools in the 31 states, Mexico City and major big cities. The Escuela Nacional de Bibliotecología y Archivistomía could be a very viable option since it already belongs to the Secretaría de Educación Pública. Such schools should deliver total grants and scholarships for non professional librarians so they can carry on undergraduate and graduate studies in library science.

- b. It could be evaluated the possibility that the salaries of municipal librarians may be paid directly by the federal or state government as it already exists in the school teaching scheme or among the three instances of government, so this can avoid that municipalities pay librarians salaries by themselves as it occurs currently, the wage load would be more balanced on the three government bodies, therefore rotation of personnel would be highly avoided and the development and implementation of training programs as well as any others would have better chances of success.
4. Selection and recruitment of personnel should be made based on a professional profile rather than based on political affiliations. For new hirings it should be respected at least the guideline proposed by Dirección General de Bibliotecas where the minimal educational requirement should be high school.⁸
5. The scale service should be implemented, where public librarians could be promoted based on their education and seniority and obtain higher and better wages, similar to the school teaching scheme.

CONCLUSION

There may be many other strategies, but we believe that these ones can be a good start to begin raising our minds to what could be the construction of a new human resources paradigm in the Mexican public libraries. Again, the evaluation for its implementation it depends in great deal of the leadership of the national library guild through CNB, AMBAC and other library associations, since this guild can be convinced that we can and must change the paradigm, only by doing so it could convince the organisms and entities that for good or bad are the fundamental pillars for the development of the public libraries.

⁸ MEXICO. SEP. CONACULTA. *Memoria del Primer Encuentro Internacional sobre Bibliotecas Públicas: Perspectivas en México para el Siglo XXI*, Ciudad de México, del 24 al 28 de septiembre de 2001. México: CONACULTA/ Dirección General de Bibliotecas, “Mesa Redonda sobre Recursos Humanos” (Colección “Biblioteca del Bibliotecario”), 2001, p. 215.
<http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00013414/>