Professionalism: Exploring the role and responsibility of our professional associations

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“Library associations are key institutions in the library and information sector around the world. Library associations are advocates for equitable access to information, and help to build strong, sustainable library communities by improving services for library users and supporting development of the profession….. They unite a country’s library community around a common platform for advocacy and development of the profession”

IFLA. Building Strong Library Associations Impact Report 2012
1. Introduction and definitions
2. Development of the theory
3. The elements of professionalism
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5. Why professionalism matters
6. Responsibilities of professional associations with regard to professionalism
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Introduction

Our profession is changing and is quite different today from the profession our national associations were established to support.

Many professionals are choosing to not join the national associations – this makes them less than representative; makes them less financially viable; and makes our collective voice weaker.

The three main reasons for not joining are cited as (1) lack of relevance; (2) cost; and (3) competition from other associations and groups:
- A relatively small proportion of those who do join are actively engaged and participative – this limits the products and services they can provide.
- An even smaller proportion step up for formal roles on Boards, committees and other working groups.

Organizational professionalism and occupational professionalism often conflict.
Definitions

• Professional associations
  – Establish and maintain the aspects of the profession on which perceptions are based (Beaton 2010)
  – Establish standards of practice (ethics, duty of care, honesty, due diligence, perseverance, willingness to listen and learn and trustworthiness)
  – Establish and protect boundaries of the profession and stake the territory in which the profession operates
  – Promote the profession
  – Develop the prestige of the profession through education
  – Safeguard and protect the specialized knowledge of the field
  – Certify the attainment of specialized knowledge
  – Develop standards and regulations by which the profession operates
  – Preserve the integrity of the profession
  – Keep up with innovations, developments and knowledge and disseminate to members through communications, publications, conferences, seminars and training processes
Definitions

• Professionalization
  – Professionalization is the process by which a trade or occupation transforms itself into a true profession. This involves establishing acceptable qualifications, a professional body or association to oversee the conduct of members of the profession, and some degree of demarcation of the qualified from unqualified. The professionalization process tends to establish the group norms of conduct and qualification of members of a profession.

• Professional identity
  – One’s professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences. i.e. how a person feels about being a professional within a profession. Identity is shaped by education, career evolvement, professional association connectedness, certification, competence, ethics, specialization, standards, supervision, and role perception.

• Professionalism
  – How people behave as they do their work in terms how they apply their professional skills, knowledge and experience - the methods, standards, character of a professional – behaviours/conduct, attitudes, values (trust, ethics, honesty), commitment to the profession and the use of a professional association as a referent.
Definitions

Professional identity and professionalism
- are inextricably linked
- how a person feels about being a member of a professional impacts on their values, behaviours/conduct, attitudes to their work

This is influenced by:
- the organizational situation (culture, management, responsibility, autonomy)
- professional association (colleagues, connections and networks)

And by:
- Formal education, ongoing professional development and training
- Professional experience (support, respect, acknowledgement of knowledge, skill and experience)
- Public perception (media, literature, community/user feedback)
So ..... we have relationships between professional identity, professionalism, professional associations and the ways in which the profession is perceived by others.
Development of the theory that relates professionalism to professional associations

<table>
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<th>1960s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
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<th>2010</th>
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<td>Hall &amp; Wilensky</td>
<td>Evetts and others</td>
<td>Noordegraaf</td>
<td>Beaton</td>
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<td>Developed and validated ‘professional models’ that set out relationships between professionalism, professional identity and professional associations</td>
<td>Works on understanding declining membership of, and disinterest in professional associations</td>
<td>Works on the relationship between the changing organizational requirements of professions and the resultant changes in what people need from their professional associations</td>
<td>Works on the ongoing importance of professional associations in times of dynamic change to traditional professions</td>
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The elements of professionalism

How an individual:
- Applies their knowledge and skills
- Applies research and theory to practice
- Takes control of their career and associated learning
- Commits to doing their job well
- Communicates about their profession to others
- Associates with others in their profession and industry
- Underpins their work with the values of trust and honesty
The elements of professionalism

- Respect for others
- Professional demeanor
- Professionalism
- Accountability and initiative
- Integrity and trustworthiness
- Responsibility and sense of duty
- Self-care and self-growth
- Scholarship and commitment to learning
- Teamwork

Professional values and personal commitment

Professional knowledge and understanding

Professional skills and abilities

Professional Action

PROFESSIONALISM

CHARACTER

COMPLIANCE

EFFICIENT

FUN

COMFORT

CO-WORKERS

CLIENTS

CONDUCT

SMART

ETHICAL

Cognizance

EXPERIENCE

SKILLS

HARD WORK

SECURITY

Commitment

PERSONAL

INTERESTS

ORGANIZATIONAL

INTERESTS

Completion

CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Creating New Knowledge

Problem Solving

Applying Theoretical Knowledge to Practice

Commitment & Enthusiasm

Professionalism

Verified Professional™
Evolving professionalism

Traditional professionalism
- View of learning: Learning is an individual process
- Professional activity: Decision making about the nature of professional activity belongs in the hands of professionals
- Quality measures: Quality is determined by professional knowledge
- Organization: Professions are organized by their own disciplinary structures

New professionalism
- View of learning: Learning is an individual process
- Professional activity: Professional activity is organized by professional managers
- Quality measures: Competence is measured by performance criteria
- Organization: Increased specialization and fragmentation sees professions organized by generic structures

Involved professionalism
- View of learning: Learning is a social process
- Professional activity: Professional activity is a set of relationships between self, others and the research/theory of professional practice
- Quality measures: Quality through professional development by intentional engagement and dialogue
- Organization: Professions organized according to their own disciplinary structures but open to influence from related disciplines
Why professionalism matters

PROFESSIONALISM
That's not my job.
Why professionalism matters

What people experience influences their perception of value

We have a profession that is perceived to be a service industry
• Good and efficient customer service is NOT professionalism
• Our professional contribution is largely hidden
• Our leaders and managers often do not understand and/or respect professionalism

The way we behave shapes:
• Public/community/organizational perspective/s of the organization, the person and the profession
• Levels of trust
• Whether or not people come back
Responsibilities of professional associations with regard to professionalism

Responsibilities (External)

- Advocacy reflecting the value of the profession to society
- Advocacy reflecting the prestige of the profession
- Maintenance of the integrity of the profession
- Identification, definition and protection of the profession’s unique knowledge base (UKB)
- Identification, definition and protection of the profession’s territory

Responsibilities (Internal)

- Representation and inclusion of all members of the profession
- Accreditation of formal education for the profession
- Association (networks, e-lists, groups, communication)
- CPD (training, conferences, certification/chartership, involvement in association activities)
- Dissemination of knowledge (conferences, publications, workshops/seminars)
- Provision of standards and guidelines
Disruptive influences

Perception of the profession
- Attracting people to the profession
- Recruitment
- Respect and acknowledgement of skill and expertise

Convergence
- Compromise of specialized knowledge
- Blurring of the boundaries of our professional territory
- Broadening of content of LIS education curricula / mismatch between curricula and workplace requirements

Technology, particularly social media
- Changing ways of ‘associating’ (networks, groups etc.)
- Communication options
- Knowledge dissemination
Disruptive influences

Deprofessionalization
- Delineation between professional and paraprofessional has shifted
- ‘Professionalization ‘ of long term employees without qualifications
- Employment of non-librarians

Associations
- Membership association or a professional association
- Supporting individuals (members) or employing organizations (libraries)

Organizational influences
- Increasing number of members employed outside libraries
- Competing standards, guidelines, regulations and expectations
So what are the key questions?

• How do we support the development and maintenance of professionalism through our workplaces and associations?

• How do we address the tensions between occupational and organizational professionalism?

• How do we articulate the professionalism that is appropriate for our profession?

• How do we integrate the concept of professionalism into our formal education?

• How can we use our professionalism to promote the profession?

• How can we ensure that professionalism in the workplace is valued?
References


The broader study

The impact of national library associations on their members, libraries and the profession

Do professional associations make a difference?

What does a national library association do that impacts on its members, the organizations that employ them and the profession it was established to support?

• Project timeline: March 2014 – December 2016
• Data collection: August 2013 – March 2014
The broader study

Using the formal impact assessment model provided by ISO/DIS 16439 Methods and Procedures for Assessing the Impact of Libraries, this research aims to:

1. provide evidence of impact that enables librarians to make informed decisions about national association membership;

2. provide national library associations with evidence to enable them to understand what it is that makes a difference to their members, to libraries and to the profession of librarianship; and

3. provide library associations with evidence to use in advocating for their role in supporting their members, libraries and the profession of librarianship.

It is anticipated that the methodology used for this study will be transferable to other professions and other associations.
The research so far …

Interviews have been conducted with members of ALA, ALIA, CLA, LIANZA and CILIP

Responses so far have revealed issues about
• Association and associations
• Job titles
• Employer reputation
• Professional identity
• Professionalism
About association …

Associations are a significant influence in the shaping of professional identity.

Positive elements of association include pride, validation, a feeling of belonging, community, and friendships ‘beyond the professional’.

‘Association’ (knowing people) provides increased professionalism in the workplace through networks & connections.
About association …

Engaging with the association has given me the skills, networks and confidence to try new things and take risks in what I do – both in the workplace and within the profession – presentations, travel, trying new roles etc.

In the profession we have 15% visionaries and 85% doers – they need to be connected and through the national association is the way to do that.
There is an issue with non-members being barred from the work of the association through ‘member only’ access – is the association there to support the profession or just association members? If just members then it is a member association and not a truly professional association.

Are our national associations about supporting employing institutions or people? The two types of membership are confusing and discourage personal membership when a person is working for an organisation that takes out institutional membership.
About job titles …

There is a close correlation between professional identity and titles - using different titles impacts on professionalism as people ‘disconnect’ from librarianship and become something else.

Some hang on to the title librarian - librarians who insist on being called librarian instead of taking job titles that suit the organization - by taking on titles like manager, director and getting the rank right they get talked to.
About job titles …

I do call myself a librarian but I also am very careful to separate out my profession from my job. A lot of librarians conflate the two and you know when an engineer calls himself an engineer all his or her life when they become president of an oil company they don't say they are not a engineer anymore.

There is conflict between ‘what I do’ versus ‘what I am’ with regard to titles – this is the difference between my profession and my job. I call myself whatever the audience will understand – information manager, project manager, etc. but I am still a librarian. People understand what a librarian does but most of the other library-related titles are awkward and don't have a clear meaning for anyone.
About employer reputation …

Positive professionalism on the part of an individual can enhance the reputation of the employer.

I think my active involvement in association activities has made my employer look good. It looks like they are committed to the profession as well. When I put myself forward for something the name of my employer goes along with me.

Making my organization more visible is a big deal. More people have started caring about it – both from within the organization and from outside.
About professionalism …

There is a difference between providing a professional service and providing a service professionally. This has both positive and negative connotations – we are perceived as being very efficient and helpful and kind and nice and friendly but we are seen as subservient instead of as professional partners. Much of what we report on is how efficient and busy we are and not what problems we have solved as professionals.

Service perspective – this is what is visible and what forms public/community perspectives – how do we promote/make visible what goes on behind the scenes with regard to professional knowledge and expertise?
About professionalism …

The association has a key role in setting standards and in defining and advocating for professional values – when you put standards and professional values together – to an outsider, that's what professionalism looks like.

Part of being professional is recognising the skills and expertise of other professions – we should be using professional lobbyists to speak on our behalf. Librarians, although well meaning and good hearted, are not professional lobbyists and the voices of the national associations cannot be heard.
About professionalism …

The only thing you get from a membership are opportunities – you then have to do something with them. You can take it or leave it but if you are professional you are smart enough to recognize the opportunities and be willing to take them.

My professionalism is made stronger by my professional networks and the ways in which I can use those networks to help solve my clients problems.
Please contact me for further information about the research study or if you would like to participate.

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