

INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL: AUDITING THE PEOPLE ASSETS*

By Hazel Dakers

People in all kinds of society have realised for centuries that in times of uncertainty - war, revolution and other great change - learning can turn out to be their most valuable investment. Regardless of the collapse of political structures, for as long as one lives, the knowledge acquired through learning - and the intellectual capability that has accompanied that acquisition of knowledge - will stick. Countless groups of people have been forced to leave their homes, their belongings and accumulated wealth. They cannot be separated from their intellectual capital. This has been invested by many a refugee in a new life in a new country.

Globally we live in times of turbulence and change. Society is moving at a greater speed now at the close of the twentieth century - in part thanks to the rapid developments in information and communications technology (ICT) - than ever it did in Europe two hundred years ago in the first industrial revolution. Those under the age of about 35 who may be classified as Generation X have abandoned organisational loyalty and have identified the constant development of their own skills as their personal passports to survival in our changing times. No coincidence, then, that we are turning towards intellectual capital and knowledge management as the kernel of continuing value within our organisations. Whatever the next decade brings, the wise organisation is realising that it must develop, nurture and exploit its corporate knowledge because much else that we now recognise may be discarded.

Mine might be described as the worm's eye view. Skills development is an area in which I have specialised for some years. What this paper covers is by no means a solution to listing the human side of intellectual capital within information and library services organisations. It is more of a report on the small progress made by Easter 1998, an outline of developments by November 1998 and a mention of the many factors contingent to these.

At the end of 1997 I started to work at the British Library - the day after our

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newbuilding at St. Pancras was first opened to the public. This was an exciting moment to join. As the new Head, British Library Consultancy Services (a commercial unit providing strategic advice on information and library services planning and management), my remit was to develop and commercialise the ten year old service based at the Research and Innovation Centre. Additionally the British Library sees consultancy as an opportunity for staff development and for importing external experience and ideas. How could this be done without first knowing what are the skills amongst the 2,500 staff of the British Library? At the same time some of the BL senior management team were trying to grasp the nettle of making a cultural change within the organisation as a whole. Somehow or other the relaunch of consultancy services and the audit of potential consultancy skills of British Library staff must be placed within the mainstream of change that was about to envelop the whole being of the British Library.

I was invited, meanwhile, to join a group of relatively recent recruits amongst professional staff who were being drawn into the British Library Change Group to add their perspectives from the outside world. It was felt that our Directorate should become responsible for the British Library Research Register (a published listing to which staff may contribute their research activities) and continue its work on the Corporate Research List (an unpublished and incomplete listing of internal projects mainly in the IT field). It soon became apparent that if the two existing registers could be completed they, together with a comprehensive skills audit and contacts data base would constitute much of the living intellectual capital of the British Library. I have chosen to use the word “living” to distinguish between the intellectual capital produced by the British Library’s own staff and that much greater part of it which is contained within its stock.

I had first approached the problem of a skills audit by applying my background in functional analysis and competence. I had managed the original development of UK occupational standards in Information and Library Services which were used to create our competence based National Vocational Qualifications. Functional analysis, for this British Library project, was too simplistic. Identifying the skills present amongst staff running a library - even a very large one - is quite different from identifying those of their skills which other organisations might wish to consult for advice. The information and library services skills identified by functional analysis have largely been from a clerical level to a middle management level. Consultancy is usually a strategic level activity and might be influenced by the functional analysis of Management which has been carried out to this strategic level. However, even these competencies alone will not be enough because, in consultancy, personal skills such as good communication, a willingness to adapt experience to new contexts, evidence of one's own continuing

professional development and currency at the cutting edge of the profession, availability to suit the client, experience of working overseas and ability to work in other languages may all be equally important. As yet the skills needing identification have not been fully defined.

A brief reading into the work of other organisations in this field alerted me to the developing experience of the World Bank and Booz Allen & Hamilton amongst others. Thames Valley Enterprise offered a demonstration of their Consultants' data base and I was fortunate to visit the London offices of Booz Allen & Hamilton where I was shown examples of their management of corporate knowledge or intellectual capital. This provided several ideas. British Library Consultancy Services needed a bank of information on staff who wish to undertake consultancy and associate consultants with whom it works. Similarly after both research and consultancy projects two summaries need to be written. One will be an account of the project. The other will be an expression of "our current best thinking" on the particular topic. Both will include names and contact points for key personnel. In time these data banks should be augmented by parallel internal British Library project information. If this knowledge becomes shared by all British Library staff across all directorates the organisation stands to benefit from fully using its resources. By programming these data bases to be linked, one area of work should feed into another.

The original quest for a model for this particular type of skills audit has so far been unsuccessful. Booz Allen & Hamilton have delayed on this aspect as they recognise it will be difficult and time consuming. It was originally proposed that the information be stored on the new contacts database developed for the Research and Innovation Centre. This idea has been overtaken by events as the UK government has now decided to merge the British Library's research function (ie most of the Centre) with the Library and Information Commission. However, in reality the numbers involved from the consultancy angle will be small - possibly two hundred and fifty - and so the database itself need therefore not be too complicated.

At first it was hoped to distribute the questionnaire by intranet but too few staff currently have access or, if they do have, use it only infrequently. Consequently a dual approach was taken by sending it to all on e-mail as an attached file and to all staff in hard copy. Advance notice was given to Directors, who were asked to encourage staff to respond, and items appeared in a weekly bulletin and the monthly house magazine. The questionnaire asked sufficiently general questions to allow for free text response, intending that this should be edited for database entry - a thesaurus to be drawn up by the editor. The numbers responding were disappointing, particularly at a level of seniority which might be indicative of

consultancy capability. The reasons for this varied from the stressed situation in which British Library managers find themselves – with the familiar story of increased expectations but reduced resources – to the encouraging desire for greater fulfillment implied by the more junior respondents. However, the advantage of a voluntary staff skills survey over a mandatory skills audit is that it has brought to light the staff who want to be flexible and contribute their skills to the organisation in alternative ways.

This has led me to believe, now that we are in the first of the implementation phases of BL2001 (our range of cultural change programmes), that the greatest value of the consultancy questionnaire could be in using its results to develop internal consultancy within the British Library. In this way staff who have demonstrated their wish to be flexible by completing the questionnaire would be asked to apply particular skills for short periods in departments – other than their base departments – where there is a short term need. They would also be asked to pass on these skills to colleagues. At the same time as assisting the British Library towards adjusting to the changes required of it, this experience of internal consultancy could develop the generic skills required for commercial, external consultancy amongst a cohort of staff. Internal consultancy would stimulate movement within a fairly static staffing structure and opportunities for personal development using existing resources – rather than buying in resources. Of course, British Library Consultancy Services would also benefit from this approach.

I have proposed the tool of Knowledge Management to achieve this, suggesting that staff skills might be the first area of knowledge to be managed in this way. Natural contributors would also be marketing information, and studies carried out for individual departments of the British Library by external consultants. In a library of 2,500 staff it is difficult to ensure that all who need to know about a current activity in a particular area do, in fact, know. In this way not only would the British Library be the memory of the UK but it would also create its own corporate memory.

Now it is only possible to share with you the germ of an idea (and some of the above, I should add, is essentially my own thinking and not yet British Library policy). The ideas described here have now been formally proposed to the decision making fora within the British Library and its change programme, BL 2001. Like so many other historic institutions the British Library is having to change to survive. The British Library government grant this year was £8million sterling less than is needed to restore acquisitions and conservation to previous levels. If no action is taken the shortfall is expected to increase to approximately £20million sterling by 2003. Additionally the British Library is having to handle

the difficulties and stimuli created by the new building and changing expectations of the marketplace. These are often triggered by the fast moving developments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) mentioned earlier. The identification of the skills of flexible members of British Library staff will enable the British Library to capitalise on its own existing resources, to provide more development opportunities for its staff and will enable British Library Consultancy Services to access those skills on behalf of its clients.

If the British Library decides to take this step, to create its own “digital nervous system” as Bill Gates has named this type of approach, it will, I believe, be taking a fairly unusual and radical approach to managing human resources within libraries.

This is just one small current of intellectual capital in a sea of change.

References

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tell us about your talents

why yet another survey?

.....2,500 staff with a great variety of skills linked to past and present jobs.....You are one of these! External and internal changes are creating opportunities to use these skills in different ways which could be your chance to broaden your own professional horizons *and* benefit the Library.

what does this survey cover?

Four activities.....

- a search for consultants for British Library Consultancy Services. Consultancy is defined here as either strategic level advice or assistance with application of skills in short supply eg cataloguing in Japanese. British Library Consultancy Services is run as a commercial activity. The department of staff who take part is reimbursed by at least the salary value of the time lost. Often teams are formed, involving external consultants.
- an update of your entry in the **British Library Research Register**.
- internal research information, previously collected for the Corporate Research Group, such as survey work or a project with (overseas) partners. We are particularly interested in EU funded work eg BIBLINK.
- any of your skills of which the British Library does not take full advantage. In the period of change to be brought about by BL2001 the need, for instance, for proven marketing skills has been identified. What are your secret skills?

what's in it for you?

A possible opportunity to match your skills to new challenges in a different environment; to enjoy project work, possibly in a team; and to extend your professional experience for your own benefit and to the benefit of the Library.

Responses by 30th September please!

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Note: *This form does not commit you to accepting projects nor does it commit us to offering them to you. We will check with your line management at an early stage. Each project is considered individually and the range of staff and associates is reviewed to make the most appropriate match. No information will be published outside the Library without your permission.*

1. contact details

name:

directorate:

department:

job title:

BL Location:

Tel:

Fax:

2. formal qualifications (further and higher education only)

qualification	subject	awarding institution	Date

3. career history (reverse order starting with current post)

job title	employer/ dept	BL	BL grade	Dates From.....to

4. languages

In which foreign languages are you able to work?

5. professional referees

Whom we may contact if you register for contract research or consultancy work.

These may be line managers or not, as you prefer.

name: _____ **job title:** _____
organisation: _____
address: _____
tel: _____ **fax:** _____ **e-mail** _____

name: _____ **job title:** _____
organisation: _____
address: _____
tel: _____ **fax:** _____ **e-mail** _____

6. experience

Please be succinct - maximum of one A4 page covering issues such as those listed below, please type and attach.

This could include:

- any **previous** consultancy, research or scholarly work you have undertaken. (Please take this opportunity to update your entry in the British Library Research Register. If you wish we can provide a copy of your previous entry - e-mail RIC).
- **results** such as publications, conference papers, client reports or the formal advice you have given to external bodies such as HLF, NMHF, NMCT.
- details of any **other relevant experience** beyond your normal duties eg working parties, task forces, special projects, reviews, supervising library moves, selection boards or spare time professional or community responsibilities.
- a description of how you have kept **up to date** professionally eg reading, taking part in conferences, taking additional qualifications etc.

7. expertise

Please delete any of the following from which you wish to be excluded:

- consultancy
- externally funded contract research

- internal BL management research
- scholarly research
- skills to contribute towards BL2001

Please be succinct and type and attach up to one A4 page for each of the activities which interest you, including such information as:

- an annotated **list** of the areas in which you are sufficiently confident of your **specialist knowledge** to be willing to offer consultancy or carry out research.
- an indication of the **subsidiary areas** in which you would be able to provide guidance in a broad based project.
- the highlighting of any **special skill** which sets you apart from the rest of us.
- an indication of the strength of your **wider abilities** which are essential to consultancy and research. Comment on your capacity to deliver on time, to write reports, to give concise presentations, to interview individuals, to give advice, to work in sensitive situations.