THE
DYSFUNCTIONAL
LIBRARY

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS TO WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

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INTRODUCTION

When we first began this project, our discussions ranged from successes to challenges to managerial methods we had encountered during our nearly fifty years of collective managerial experience. Inevitably, the challenges left the deepest impressions, which steered us towards the topic of workplace dysfunction. Instead of writing another how-to book about library management, we focused on this concept. At the time, we did not know our exploration of dysfunction would lead us to information that was valuable not only to managers, but to anyone working in a library organization. It was not surprising that much of what we found echoed managerial and staff challenges we had experienced. Many have asked us if this is a "tell-all" book about our experiences. It is not. Instead, we chose to approach the topic from an academic viewpoint and draw our final conclusions from available evidence. Our work led us to define and categorize dysfunctional behaviors and to look at potential solutions.

When discussing this project with friends and peers, nearly every conversation produced a story about a problem with a coworker or manager. Even years later, many of the stories were emotionally charged. We would later discover that this long-lasting impact is not uncommon. Many people we talked with asked us to include their specific issue because they wanted to prevent others from encountering similar negative experiences in the future. However, because the range of individual dysfunctions is extensive, we could not address them all. We were, however, able to address many, and we believe everyone who reads this book will be able to personally relate to this work. One of the goals in writing this book was to inspire discussion about dysfunction in the library workplace. Another was to provide practical and useful solutions for these challenging situations. It is our hope that we have accomplished both goals.

Although many of the topics of individual chapters could be the subject of entire books, we strove to provide an overview of various dysfunctions found in many organizations, including libraries. Our focus was on the

library work environment rather than interactions with students or patrons. Because there was limited research specific to the topic, we conducted our own survey of 4,186 library workers. Many of the study results have been included in the text. Not surprisingly, our library-specific survey results on dysfunction were similar to studies of other industries and organizations. Although libraries are unique in many ways from other organizational environments, they face similar challenges from workplace dysfunction.

This journey into workplace dysfunction cannot begin without self-examination. Chapter one examines the importance of understanding our relationship to the library workplace and identifies library specific attributes that foster personal achievement. This chapter also addresses the important role emotional intelligence plays in an individual's success as a functioning contributor to the library workplace, while acknowledging that psychological disorders and burnout are significant elements with which library staff must deal. It also offers examples of dysfunction and remedies for library-specific problems.

Whereas chapter one focuses on the self, chapter two probes how organizational culture can be a potential source of dysfunction. Dysfunction stemming from the organizational level is often rooted in poor communication and lack of employee engagement, although we know the critical factor of trust is enhanced through "more effective internal communication."[1] The chapter explores how silos within the organizational structure negatively impact communication. Overbearing bureaucracies create a culture of dysfunction by stifling workers' voices and creativity. Worst of all, poor leadership, especially when it ignores bad behavior, can be corrosive to a library's culture. Finally, the chapter reflects on other potential causes and impacts a dysfunctional organizational culture can create.

Chapter three is the first of two chapters dealing with individual deviant behaviors that are based on interpersonal relationships. The minor deviant behaviors are reviewed in this chapter. Incivility is present in all work organizations, libraries included. We investigate findings of the library-specific incivility survey, which documented the prevalence of rude behaviors in library work environments. This kind of dysfunction (which is experienced more often among the younger generations) is on the rise. The chapter goes on to review its causes and effects and explores solutions for workplace incivility.

The more disturbing and toxic work behaviors displayed by staff are addressed in chapter four. A lengthy examination of bullying and mobbing in the workplace reveals both the prevalence and severity of such toxic behaviors on individual workers and the organization. Solutions to help

individuals and the organization counter these behaviors are presented. Other behaviors potentially toxic to the workplace are reviewed, including passive-aggressive and counterproductive work behaviors. As in chapter three, we have included library-specific survey data gathered on toxic workplace experiences.

The impact on organizations of dysfunctional behaviors that affect property and create political deviations is addressed in chapter five. Employees act out in ways that negatively impact the organization. This chapter addresses causes, results, and potential solutions for cyberloafing, fraud, theft, and sabotage. It also investigates gossip's impact on the organization and workplace, in addition to the fallout from rankism, bias, and individual lobbying in the library organization.

Chapter six focuses on challenges in communication. It begins with a review of communication channels, and addresses challenges that originate in the library's organizational structure, such as limited or distorted information. This chapter also looks at the impact of individuals who have communication apprehension or introverted personalities. The effect of other barriers such as passive listening, dismissive communication, and a lack of empathy are explored. Finally, some of the negative impacts on the library organizations resulting from poor communication are considered.

Chapter seven covers conflict management. Conflict occurs in all organizations, and though certain types of conflict can be healthy, much is not. A variety of conflict management approaches are reviewed. In addition to addressing the wider scope of conflict management, the chapter discusses situational conflict and how to identify the managerial skills needed to handle these challenging situations.

The impact of ineffective collaboration dominates chapter eight. First, we identify some of the general barriers to collaboration among individuals in the library workplace. These include the general culture; attitudes of group members; lack of trust; distance; poor synchronization; and stress. The chapter notes how organized and productive meetings contribute to successful collaboration. The importance of workplace design on collaboration, as well as the insufficient attention devoted to this topic, are also addressed. Finally, chapter eight discusses how staff's resistance to change and to participate in collaborative activities can impact a library.

It is the rare librarian who does not find herself in workplace situations where she is required to be part of a team. Chapter nine focuses primarily on team composition and how managers can build functional and productive teams. To help consider how to design teams, we present ideas that help to reconcile the tension between the goals of teamwork and individual

personalities, strengths, and weaknesses. Sometimes there is a failure to acknowledge the number of teams in which librarians participate, and that they may not give enough attention to their team roles.

In chapter ten, the influence of functional leadership (or lack thereof) in libraries is addressed. The present consists of, and the future will be, challenging times for library leaders. In a world that demands agile and forward-thinking leaders, librarians are often at a disadvantage because of budgetary constraints, the constant need to prove value, and the need to provide guidance to the employees they supervise. In addition to the issues that can contribute to dysfunctional libraries, there is the added dimension of recognizing and alleviating all the individual dysfunctions documented in this book. Because the future of libraries depends upon providing support and information access to their communities, this chapter sounds a clarion call to those who have a passion to lead libraries forward.

It is our hope that the readers will find topics they relate to in every chapter of this book. While we encourage readers to start with chapter one and begin their journeys by reflecting upon the self, each chapter focuses on a specific area of dysfunction and can be read on its own. The only recommendation we would offer would be to read the two chapters on individual dysfunctional behaviors (chapters 3 and 4) in sequence as the first addresses lower-level behaviors and the second explores more toxic and disruptive ones. Otherwise, let the page turn and the exploration of library workplace dysfunction begin.

NOTE

1. Karen Mishra, Lois Boynton, and Aneil Mishra, "Driving Employee Engagement: The Expanded Role of Internal Communications," *International Journal of Business Communication* 51, no. 2 (April 2014): 199.

THE DYSFUNCTIONAL SELF

t is human nature for individuals to blame the problems that they see in the world and in the library workplace on someone or something other than themselves. As this book will indicate, there are often good reasons to look for external validation of why dysfunctional systems and situations exist. This chapter could have been put at the end of this book, but there is a reason for its placement at the beginning. It may seem cliché, but if librarians and administrative staff really hope to improve their respective libraries and the work that is done in them, it *starts with improving themselves*. The intent of this book is to deal with dysfunctional issues and problems, and this chapter is no exception. It is, however, worth noting that while library staff may not exhibit a major degree of dysfunctional behavior, none are not entirely immune. As humans and as librarians, all of us are essentially works in progress. Ronald Wheeler, the director of the Fineman and Pappas Law Libraries and an associate professor of law and legal research at Boston University, bravely declared, "I had to admit to myself that I was the source of the problem and that I had to work on my own internal issues in order to function appropriately in the workplace and elsewhere." Jamie Watson, Collection Development Coordinator for the Baltimore County Public Library, writes that "sometimes in a busy work day, you (and others) make knee-jerk decisions." As a recent study by the authors of this book revealed, workload and frequent interruptions—just

to name a couple of external challenges—can be constant hurdles for many librarians. This chapter will examine individual attributes that have been identified as critical or in some cases dysfunctional. It will then explore the topic of emotional intelligence and its applicability to libraries and librarians; briefly touch on the relative prevalence and effect of psychological disorders in the library workplace (especially if they pertain to us personally); and, finally consider anecdotally how these relate to a handful of specific library roles.[1]

LIBRARIAN TRAITS AND ATTRIBUTES IN GENERAL

It is the authors' contention that emotional intelligence, or a lack thereof, plays a central role in dysfunctional decision-making and behavior in the library workplace. As such, much of this chapter targets emotional intelligence and how it can be built, encouraged, and repaired. Other relevant factors to consider include key traits that experts have identified as pertinent for workplace success. For example, in citing several other authors, Helen Partridge, Julie Lee, and Carrie Munro state that all librarians must be willing to experiment and accept that change will, at times, entail mistakes.[2]

Partridge, Lee, and Munro also note the work of Cheryl Peltier-Davis, associate cataloging librarian at the Alvin Sherman Library at Nova Southeastern University in Florida, who outlines a long list of the traits or attributes that individuals should look for and foster in themselves. They must

- have the capacity to learn constantly and quickly
- monitor new ways of organizing and accessing resources
- keep abreast of trends in technology
- possess the temperament to work independently as well as work on a team
- have the propensity to take risks and to work under pressure
- be service- and user-oriented
- be skillful at enabling and fostering change
- have a sense of humor (most important!)
- be committed to continuing formal and informal education . . .
- conduct research and publish results
- read professional literature, especially outside the field
- become actively and, in some instances brazenly, involved in ILS design and usability studies

- support cooperation and collaboration among the global community of librarians
- advocate for the profession by marketing the value of web 2.0, library 2.0, and librarian 2.0 to decision-makers.[3]

This is a daunting list, but extremely pertinent to our desire to avoid dysfunction and be as productive as we can be. It is worth noting that Partridge, Lee, and Munro conclude their study on attributes of librarians by stating that "librarian 2.0 is less to do with technology and more about quality transferable skills and interpersonal abilities." Of greater importance is the study's discovery that librarian 2.0 is more about changing attitudes and ways of thinking than anything else.[4]

When exploring individual traits, it is interesting to look at how they can change under specific circumstances and over time. Patrick Kyllonen discusses how particular events in our lives seem to be associated with significant changes in personality: Successful careers are associated with increases in emotional stability and conscientiousness, remarriage is associated with a reduction in neuroticism, just as numerous other such life events can correlate with change. Any number of events that affect individual lives can have profound or subtle impacts. Kyllonen also describes an additional study that indicated that "self-confidence, warmth, self-control, and emotional stability all tend to increase with age." This is a hopeful sign. Perhaps time, coupled with greater awareness, can boost this process.[5]

Before moving on to a more detailed treatment of emotional intelligence, it is worth touching on the importance of grit and resilience. Dysfunction might come from a tendency to give up at the first sign of adversity instead of applying a reasonable amount of perseverance. Grit is a known quality or attribute that helps us to persevere. Although the authors' focus here is on librarians, it is worth noting that many institutions of higher education have in recent years developed programs to encourage students to assess their own grit and resilience. For example, the Educational Testing Service recently created the Personal Potential Index (PPI), which, among other attributes, measures just these traits.[6]

At Johnson & Wales University in Charlotte, NC, new-student orientations have taken on the task of introducing students to the concept of having a growth mindset and the importance of grit and resilience as masterfully discussed by Carol Dweck in her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success:*

> Sometimes we don't want to change ourselves very much. We just want
> to be able to drop some pounds and keep them off. Or stop smoking.
> Or control our anger. Some people think about this in a fixed mindset
> way. . . Some people think about losing weight or controlling their anger
> in a growth mindset way. They realize that to succeed, they'll need to
> learn and practice strategies that work for them.[7]

This book focuses on workplace-related thoughts and behaviors. Adopting a growth mindset is a critical element of improving or reducing dysfunction, and it goes hand-in-hand with the concept of emotional intelligence.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

After this brief exploration of traits and mindset, it is important to consider just how central emotional intelligence can be in defining the successful or dysfunctional library workplace. Why is emotional intelligence so critical when considering dysfunction on a personal level? In a nutshell, multiple studies have indicated that individuals who score high in emotional intelligence have better job performance and tend to be associated with high-performing teams and organizational effectiveness. Daniel Goleman, the foremost scholar associated with the concept of emotional intelligence, broke emotional intelligence down into five separate areas: "self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills." According to Goleman, "at best, IQ contributes about 20 percent to the factors that lead to life success." Although scholars and researchers continue to debate this exact percentage, it is widely accepted that cognitive ability alone is not sufficient for workplace success. In fact, dysfunction in our behavior and success could be the result of an overreliance on developing cognitive capacities at the expense of other equally or more important skills. It is necessary to break down each of these in turn, consider where we fall on the spectrum of functional to dysfunctional, and determine what we can do to play to individual strengths and repair or nurture areas of weakness. While there is some debate within the literature as to how to effectively measure emotional intelligence (e.g., by employing self-report, observed skills, or problem-solving), and there is also debate about how much people can improve, it is generally agreed that most people can benefit from training and awareness. Most authors concur that, while variance exists, nearly everyone is able to improve to

some extent. Finally, when working in a field that is experiencing rapid change, it is important not to minimize the challenges that are at the very core of self-perception.[8]

In her exploration of the professional identity with which librarians identify, Suzanne Stauffer concludes that

> Inherent in this construction of the professions as a source of identity is the recognition that changes in a profession are more than simple changes in the functions or structures of duties, responsibilities, or institutions. They are changes in the *identity which professionals derive from their membership in the profession.* [emphasis added] . . . When such changes are imposed suddenly from outside the profession or by an influx of members whose identities are radically different, such changes become challenges, even threats, to the identity which members derive from their professional role . . . The resistance of many librarians to changes in the profession over the past several decades . . . is now understood as a reaction against the imposition of an alien identity which rejects, degrades, and devalues the identity which they derive from their profession.[9]

When moving forward and considering the challenges associated with developing emotional intelligence, do not forget the context of librarianship and the special burdens that are placed on individuals who connect their personal identities with their professions. Indeed, library professionals may have opportunities to reframe some of the big picture. As Simon Lord observes, "Rather than perceive these changes as a threat to the profession, information professionals should be willing to adapt and recognize that, with the right response, these changing forces can become an opportunity to evolve and enhance their roles—from gatherer and supplier to analyst, educator and indispensable guide."[10]

The Elements of Emotional Intelligence

- self-awareness
- self-management
- self-motivation
- empathy
- social skills

Self-Awareness

When considering the topic of emotional intelligence, begin with self-awareness. Without self-awareness, the other elements of emotional intelligence are, for all practical purposes, unattainable. According to Ronald Wheeler, "being self-aware means knowing what you are feeling and why, it means knowing what you are good at and what you are not good at, it means knowing what others think about you, and it means really knowing who you are." Perhaps the most critical element is knowing our strengths and weaknesses. It is likely you have seen examples of dysfunction that have risen out of a lack of self-awareness. For example, supervisors who have anger issues but are not self-aware will have no idea where to begin in terms of correcting their dysfunctions, because taking the first step requires self-awareness. Knowledge of ourselves and our strengths and weaknesses can help us avoid or prepare for dysfunctional responses. Individuals who sometimes respond passive-aggressively might be able to recognize how they act in certain circumstances and determine what they should do to be more assertive or direct. In exploring the literature on emotional intelligence, Rosita Hopper, the dean of academic libraries at Johnson & Wales University, emphasizes the importance of being able to honestly assess oneself, especially when it comes to library leadership. Again, without self-awareness such corrective action would not be possible.[11]

According to Steven Covey,

> We are not our feelings. We are not our moods. We are not even our thoughts. The very fact that we can think about these things separates us from them and the animal world. Self-awareness enables us to stand apart and examine even the way we "see" ourselves—our self-paradigm, the most fundamental paradigm of effectiveness. It affects not only our attitudes and behaviors, but also how we see other people. In fact, until we take how we see ourselves (and how we see others) into account, we will be unable to understand how others see and feel about themselves and their world. Unaware, we will project our intentions on their behavior and call ourselves objective.[12]

Covey's observations, along with the examples provided above, support the notion that it is critically important to be self-aware.

How do we address the lack of self-awareness in ourselves or others? Michael Crumpton's creative approach suggests that we "identify others who are self-aware and demonstrate problem-solving skills in the face

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of change. Put them in a position of helping others." A related approach that is highly effective is to find a mentor or colleague who can help point out these tendencies when they occur. This should be someone who can hold up a mirror to another's behavior, even if doing so might hurt that person's feelings. Mentors should be people who are trusted and have the individual's best interests at heart. As Crumpton suggests, ideally mentors should possess good problem-solving skills. Finally, individuals who use journaling to reflect on their actions and behaviors might supplement this by touching base with a trusted mentor.[13]

Self-Management

On the surface, self-management refers to the ability to control outward behavior or appearance. However, it is connected more to the relationship individuals have with their own thoughts and feelings. Therefore, it would be a mistake to say that self-management is the act of *controlling* thoughts and behaviors. It would be better to consider it in terms of how we use awareness of inner thoughts to behave or respond in a certain way in a given situation. Dysfunction can arise even when we try to control our own thoughts. At its highest level of functionality, self-management includes a healthy ability to recognize when we are angry, sad, frustrated, or tired. Its goal is not to suppress, but rather to become more acutely aware of our emotions.

According to Kavita Singh,

> Recent research on "mindfulness" training—an emotional self-regulation strategy—has shown that with the help on appropriate training the brain centers that regulate the positive and negative emotions can be changed. This training helps people keep their anxieties and tensions at a distance and maintain their emotional calm at the time of crises. We should step back from everyday focus on getting extra work done and take out time to indulge in activities that seem unaffordable. Only the most emotionally intelligent people will have the determination to do it.[14]

Perhaps the most comprehensive book written on the topic as it relates to librarians, *The Mindful Librarian: Connecting the Practice of Mindfulness to Librarianship,* is a comprehensive text that discusses the history and context of mindfulness, how it applies in different library situations and roles, and how it can improve health and workplace performance. It provides practical and immediate solutions that can help with self-regulation

or self-management. One of the key elements to achieve this is to cultivate the ability to act less impulsively. To one degree or another, everyone makes impulsive actions. Sometimes the consequences of doing so are minimal or nonexistent. At other times, especially when critical decisions need to be made, impulsivity can have dire consequences.[15]

Covey provides a masterful explanation of this concept:

> Reactive people are often affected by their physical environment. If the weather is good, they feel good. If it isn't, it affects their attitude and their performance. Proactive people can carry their own weather with them . . . Reactive people are also affected when their social environment, by the "social weather." . . . The ability to subordinate an impulse to a value is the essence of the proactive person.[16]

Covey continues, "Proactive people are still influenced by external stimuli, whether physical, social, or psychological. But their response to the stimuli, conscious or unconscious, is a value-based choice or response." The most important component of Covey's reasoning is that whether or not we realize it, between an action and a reaction there is always an opportunity to choose. Mindfulness-based instruction in meditation, among other techniques, is intended to help us create that pause, which in turn allows us to avoid making a dysfunctional decision or taking the wrong action in a particular circumstance. Kathryn Thory discusses a recent study that "reported that police officers' skills in emotion regulation were improved significantly after intensive emotion regulation training. Strategies taught included muscle and breathing relaxation, non-judgmental perception of emotions, mood repair strategies and modification of emotions." On a practical level, role-playing, simulations, and even carefully constructed games have been shown to improve self-regulation. Therefore, we might seek out a mentor or a trusted colleague to "practice" tough situations.[17]

Self-Motivation

Librarianship is a profession full of self-motivated individuals. That is the good news. The bad news is that this is not *always* the case and everyone will face potential lapses in self-motivation. To be clear, self-motivation is motivation that comes from an internal drive to do better, create something, and assist others. As far as motivation is concerned, salary has little to do with emotional intelligence.

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So how can we improve self-motivation? Lori Freifield suggests setting goals or helping others set their own goals (which, of course, should align with institutional goals). It is important for people to have a personal level of buy-in if they are to be self-motivated. Self-motivation requires a measure of grit and resilience. Part of motivation is just sticking with goals in the face of failure or difficult situations. Paul Werlin highlights the importance of setting up a timeline and rewarding ourselves when we reach points along the way. He also suggests having fun: "Finally, enjoy yourself. While this may seem more obvious than other self-motivational tips, it's essential. If you're not having any fun, you will lose motivation and stop caring about your goals." This is not always easy to do, but hopefully everyone finds some aspects of librarianship enjoyable and can focus on those.[18]

Empathy

According to Singh, "Empathy is an essential component to enhance altruism and compassion. These tendencies may go a long way to promote and foster ethical outlook in organizations." On an institutional level, the value of empathy is obvious. Value also exists at the individual level in a practical sense. For example, Brandi Porter, the director of the library at Mt. Aloysius College adds, "As a library director I have found EI critical in building staff relationships . . . EI has enabled me to understand the feelings of my employees and how they are likely to respond in a given situation." On a managerial level, the ability to empathize is crucial. It truly cuts across all areas of the library. Lynne Maxwell, writing in *Law Library Journal,* states, "Sensitivity and empathy are traits well worth cultivating in the library environment, where a strong service orientation is crucial."[19]

What happens in a dysfunctional situation or if there is a lack of empathy in the workplace? This can lead to unhealthy situations that negatively affect communication and productivity. Therefore, it is important to cultivate empathy not only in organizations, but also in the self. One study of medical students found that reflective writing can help considerably. A study of nurses indicated that experiential learning and role-playing can be effective in building empathy. A similar approach could work with librarians. If library staff can imagine the perspective of colleagues and patrons, undoubtedly there would be some degree of increased empathy. Writing in *School Library Journal,* Karen Jensen describes how to create a culture of empathy. It is not a quick fix, but rather entails developing a deeper

understanding of specific problems and challenges that library patrons face. This can apply just as readily to our colleagues.[20]

Social Skills

Although other characteristics like self-awareness and empathy are necessary precursors to social skills, it is probably the latter that most frequently comes to mind when thinking about dysfunction in the library workplace. Much of this book will deal in detail with issues such as workplace culture and civility. But even in terms of basic or core social skills, it is worth stating that these are critical within the profession of librarianship. In a study that explored the text of job postings to determine the importance of social skills in librarianship, Reeves and Hahn "reported that 'social skills' (including communication, collaboration and cooperation, and team capabilities) was the highest category in the emotional intelligence traits they examined; over 57 percent of the advertisements mentioned these attributes." Maxwell notes that Goleman frequently defines social skills to include "influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, catalyzing change, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, and team capabilities."[21]

Whether in the library or elsewhere, most individuals have engaged in interactions with people who lack social skills. For example, we may have interacted with a colleague who is extremely shy or not a forthcoming communicator. More common dysfunctional examples include people who make rude, inappropriate, or unprofessional gestures or comments. Here too context and situation are extremely important. For instance, a conversation that is acceptable with another member of library staff might be inappropriate with a patron. The constellation of social skills includes the ability to communicate and understand body language, tone, intent, and numerous other variables. Many of us take this for granted, but these should not be underestimated as a critically important skill.

Luckily, social skills can be easier to develop than some other skill sets associated with emotional intelligence. That is not to say that this cannot be difficult for some people (an extreme example might be someone on the autism spectrum). However, practice can help. Having more opportunities to interact while consciously seeking to improve one's social skills can lead to development in this area. Participating in the profession more fully by attending social events and conferences is a good way to accomplish this.

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