BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

The Embedded Librarian: Innovative Strategies for Taking Knowledge Where it's Needed. By David Shumaker. New Jersey: Information Today, 2012. 212 pages (soft cover). ISBN 978-1-57387-452-6. US$49.50.

Shumaker's primer on the embedded librarianship (EL) model is a timely, accessible, and insightful introduction to the topic and a practical guide to the application of EL principles for librarians in all sectors.

This evidence-based text is informed by the author's own survey and synthesis research, conducted over more than 3 years with financial support from a Special Libraries Association grant. Each well-referenced chapter is supported by a balanced and thoughtful selection of literature from information science and related disciplines. However, the text isn't burdened by the formality of a scholarly communication style; it's almost effortlessly readable, with key points being illustrated by relatable anecdotes in a conversational tone. Although not all of these illustrative examples are groundbreaking (e.g., relocation of the librarian's office, attendance of librarians in class lectures), they immerse the theory of EL in the real world and help to reinforce core concepts.

The principal tenet of Shumaker's theory of EL seems to be relationship development, which rightly permeates all of the approaches discussed in the book. The primacy of interpersonal relationships is patently clear in the book's many case studies from the field, and Shumaker's insistence on discussing "user groups" rather than individual clients demonstrates his nuanced understanding of the nature of team-based workflow in knowledge organizations.

Aside from the physical "embedding" of librarians within the work environment of user groups, the author identifies three factors that define EL and differentiate it from traditional reference work: long-term relationship development that transcends transaction-based interactions; commitment to shared goals and objectives (and shared responsibility for outcomes) with user groups; and the provision of sophisticated, customized contributions, which add tangible value to the work of user groups.

Five key enablers that allow EL to be more effective than traditional reference librarianship are also presented as elemental to this model. Embedded librarians can anticipate information needs rather than just respond to them, work with entire project teams rather than individuals, provide flexible custom services rather than adhere to rigid service standards, focus on supporting an entire project rather than completing a single service request, and relate to user groups as fully engaged partners rather than from a distance as service providers.

The book's 10 chapters are divided into two parts, the first of which lays a theoretical and contextual foundation for EL. Chapters 1 and 2 define key characteristics of EL and the social and technological changes that drive it. The following four chapters survey the practice of EL across sectors: academia, health sciences, corporate–government–nonprofit, and school–public. Of particular interest is Chapter 4, which describes the evolution of embedded librarians in the health sciences, from their origins in the 1970s attending hospital rounds as "clinical medical librarians" through the growth of the evidence-based medicine paradigm to the emergence of the clinical "informationist" c. 2000. Discussions of the education and training of informationists and their key competencies (domain education, information competencies, and interpersonal skills) are particularly valuable.

Part 2 is a step-by-step guide to creating, strengthening, and sustaining an EL program that is adapted to your institution's unique organizational culture. Chapters 7 and 8, which are geared to EL beginners, identify specific indicators to measure your current "embeddedness" and readiness for transition to EL and offers scenarios describing organizations in different states of readiness. Three implementation options are proposed, ranging from true EL to a hybridized model of centralized and embedded services. Chapters 9 and 10 are more useful to librarians who are already "embedded" to some degree. Chapter 9 outlines areas in which strong leadership will promote successful EL. Shumaker's most valuable advice is to engage with user-group managers to establish the terms of the librarian-user group partnership. The final evaluation chapter, while not exhaustive, provides practical advice on selecting appropriate metrics (output, outcome, and impact) to measure EL. The book's arguments for the importance of justifying your library's existence are nothing new, but its evaluation exercises and scenarios specific to embedded librarians are worthwhile.

Meticulously well organized, the 10 chapters of this short volume are subdivided into several smaller sections no more than a few pages long. Given that the book is also scrupulously indexed, readers will have no trouble honing in on the information that is most relevant to them, which is of particular use to readers who are in the process of implementing EL and need to refer back to the text frequently. The chapters in this book don't demand to be read in order from start to finish; the book's structure invites readers to go directly to sections of interest. The summaries at the end of each brief chapter seem a little superfluous in a textbook of less than 200 pages, especially given that more summarizing occurs in the introduction and at the beginning of Parts 1 and 2, but these sections can be easily skipped over if desired.

If you are considering a shift toward a more embedded model of librarianship, this book is required reading. It is rich with best practices that have proven successful in the

field, and its detailed implementation guidance will streamline the transition to EL even in change-averse organizations. Shumaker makes a persuasive argument for evolving your model to align with emerging societal and technological trends which will inspire you to develop innovative services as well as guide your hand in the implementation of EL.

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