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# **Crossed wires: management, communication and culture in public libraries**

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## Abstract

A web-based questionnaire focusing on the attributes required of successful public library managers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was distributed to a wide range of public library systems within Australia. Comprising 53 questions grouped into categories, this anonymous questionnaire asked managers to rate themselves against these attributes while staff were asked to rate their managers against the same attributes.

Over 220 responses were received. On all questions, managers rated themselves significantly higher than did staff. The areas of greatest difference between manager and staff ratings related to the more generic skills concerned with team management, the impact of behaviour in the workplace and managing challenging staffing situations. One skills based area, knowledge of copyright and related legal issues, was highlighted by both groups as an area where knowledge was felt to be lacking.

The research concludes by identifying specific areas of professional development or training that would be beneficial for public library managers in building and maintaining an effective work place.

## Background

This paper builds on a pilot study undertaken in 2005, which looked at how effective public library managers believed themselves to be across a range of roles, compared to how staff rated their managers in performing these roles. The results from this pilot confirmed evidence found in previous studies in a range of organizations that, generally, managers do tend to estimate their abilities at a higher level than staff perceive them to be and that the gap was widest in areas considered as 'hard' to manage – conflict management and related interpersonal dealings with staff (Pymm and Lodge, 2005). The significance of these results was limited given the small number of respondents (29) who completed the survey forms. However, the suggestion that this gap appeared to exist, in places quite widely, and the usefulness of the free text comments elicited from this small sample, prompted the authors to develop a wider ranging survey aimed at collecting statistically significant data which could be used to either support or refute the findings of the pilot.

That many adults overestimate their abilities or knowledge in a whole range of situations has been widely reported. In a detailed overview of this area, Dunning, Heath and Suls, (2004) reported research showing students overrating their success in exams and overrating their ability to complete a project in a specific timeframe; lawyers over estimating the likelihood of winning their cases and, soberingly, surgical trainees having too much confidence in their diagnoses after looking at X-rays. Broadly, the research found that for areas where people feel they have a basic understanding or feeling for the subject, they will generally overestimate their capabilities. The authors go on to discuss explanations for what they term the "Above-Average Effect" including a lack of information to help make rational decisions; individuals lacking sufficient knowledge or expertise to have a realistic understanding of the situation but not realizing this and a focus on self without making any comparative judgments (Dunning, Heath and Suls, pp. 8-11).

The evidence that many of us are poor at self-appraisal, applying the Above-Average Effect in many situations, has been seen as "a benefit rather than a cognitive failing to be eradicated" (Bandura, 1994), enabling us to strive towards higher achievements, overcome obstacles and lead more fulfilling lives. This ties in with the commonly held belief that self confidence is a trait to be encouraged and developed, with high levels of self confidence being equated with high levels of self esteem, success and happiness, and the consequent ability to handle stress and anxiety. Testifying to this popular viewpoint, a quick search of Amazon.com in May 2007 using the term 'building self esteem' returns 3,784 books and a handful of videos, DVDs etc – it is obviously a subject of great popular interest. Yet studies into the perceived benefits of high levels of self esteem are not so clear cut in their findings. A recent study of self esteem and its relationship to various areas of life, including health and occupational success, reported a link between high self esteem and higher levels of happiness but that this came at a cost to those around you. The authors concluded that the benefits of high self esteem "are limited at best" (Baumeister et al, 2003 p. 37), and that it may be more useful for individuals to have accurate self knowledge, as "Although people might prefer to

hold highly favorable views of themselves, accurate views would almost certainly be more useful, insofar as accurate information is conducive to more effective decision making.” (p. 38).

This is true for most situations but is particularly pertinent for those decisions which may affect others. Thus a number of studies have been undertaken in a range of workplaces in an effort to better understand motivation and decision making at work. Harris and Schaubroeck (1988), looking at a range of studies, concluded that individual’s self ratings were generally higher than the ratings accorded them by peers or supervisors and that the correlation between self-peer and self-supervisor ratings was particularly low for managerial positions (p. 58). This was supported by Taylor and Pierce, who, in a detailed study of the effect of implementing a performance based pay agreement in a government organization, reported that most employees felt they had received a rating lower than they had expected. This does not seem to have affected their level of self esteem, with most staff blaming the discrepancy on external factors such as their supervisor, or the new appraisal system, rather than their own performance (1999, p446).

Harris and Schaubroeck also found a greater difference in correlations for those working in managerial positions, compared to blue-collar workers. The less clear cut nature of the managerial role was seen as a likely cause for this discrepancy (p. 54). As Dunning, Heath and Suls note, “people tend to believe themselves to be above average on traits that are ill defined” (p. 10). It seems that in tasks that are ambiguous, lacking clear definitions of what is good or not and with a large degree of interpretation and judgment involved, most people find it difficult to accurately assess their abilities and err on the generous side, rating their performance as above average with highly optimistic views of potential achievements. As managers, with a significant level of influence on the nature of the workplace, these attitudes can result in a poor work environment with projects not meeting their deadlines, staff overly stressed and anxious, communication problems and an overall loss of efficiency and effectiveness.

Another key finding arising from this research is the tendency to over-estimate competence exhibited by those with lesser abilities. Kruger and Dunning (1999) found that those who scored in the lowest quartile in a test were the ones who held the most exaggerated belief in their abilities. They summarised their findings thus:

We argue that when people are incompetent in the strategies they adopt to achieve success and satisfaction, they suffer a dual burden: Not only do they reach erroneous conclusions and make unfortunate choices, but their incompetence robs them of the ability to realize it (p. 1121)

This raises the concern that in such situations, individuals, being unable to recognize shortcomings in their abilities, are unlikely to seek developmental or training opportunities that would help them improve their skill and knowledge base. This results in the situation where those who should be attempting to improve their knowledge and skills in an area the most, may be the least likely to pursue such training due to misperception of their existing abilities.

These findings, when considered in the context of management of organizations, provide a level of insight into how things go wrong, sometime spectacularly. For complex situations, where information may be lacking or incomplete, for managers to successfully exercise high levels of judgment and decision making is always going to be difficult. Couple this with the evidence that suggests they may well overestimate their ability or knowledge, and the likelihood that their decision making will be of the highest quality may be substantially compromised.

Examples abound in IT and related industries, where projects routinely fail or at the very least run over budget and time. Hamil (2003), reported results from a US survey indicating that only 16% of IT projects were completed on time and within budget, with nearly one third failing and being cancelled. He then goes on to discuss four fundamental reasons for this level of failure, concluding that the primary problem is poor project management. Other areas also exhibit similar problems, with the classic Australian example of the Sydney Opera House, originally budgeted at \$7 million and a six year time frame, it was completed (in a scaled down version) in 16 years, at a cost of \$102 million (Buehler et al 2002, in Dunning, Heath and Suls, p. 41). Library projects are also not immune, with the multimillion dollar World 1 project, a collaboration between the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand that showed so much promise in 1996 had by the middle of the following year, been abandoned (National Library of Australia, 1997).

Yet assessing appropriate levels of management skills and knowledge has always proven to be understandably difficult. There is a strong personal element involved with any questioning of managerial approaches and it has proven to be extremely difficult to link clearly improved management styles with bottom-line organizational performance (see for instance Healy and Rose, 2003, and their assessment of the impact of 360 degree feedback programs). However, a UK study did find that competency based management development programs, if tightly linked with organizational strategy, do bring business benefits and should be pursued (Winterton and Winterton, 1997, p. S75).

Despite this ambiguity in linking management training and performance, techniques such as 360 degree feedback (where managers are evaluated through feedback from their managers, peers, staff and clients) and other performance management approaches are used routinely to help improve managerial competence on the assumption this will impact positively on organizational outcomes. The basis for the 360 degree and related approaches is an understanding that supervisors alone generally see relatively little of a person's behaviour and activities at work and that to judge

someone on this brief information is not a valid approach. Gathering feedback from others who probably have greater interaction with the individual should result in a more rounded picture of the manager and their job performance. This common sense understanding has led to a major take up of 360 degree or upward feedback programs within large organizations as a tool for performance evaluation.

Walker and Smither (1999), following an extensive five year longitudinal study of the impact of upward feedback on managerial performance (as indicated by their staff ratings). They found that manager's performance did improve over the period; that managers who received poor ratings at the beginning improved more than those with higher initial ratings; managers who held feedback sessions regarding their evaluation improved more than those who did not and that the feedback sessions were fundamental to the improvement. They conclude that what managers do with their evaluation is crucial – holding feedback sessions with staff and co-workers plays a major part in the improvement process.

In a summary of the effectiveness of 360 degree feedback, Aamodt (2000) noted that research suggests the level of agreement among raters (including subordinates) is relatively low, with the effectiveness of upward feedback very much dependent upon the attitude of the manager being appraised. In summary, it appeared that evidence of the long term effectiveness of upward feedback was at best contradictory with some studies showing definite improvements, some no change and some an actual decline in performance. Jackson (2005, p4) concluded that 360 degree feedback became more effective when it concentrated on tasks rather than management style and personal attributes.

In addition, a number of studies of the 360 degree approach have also supported the finding that there is a tendency for managers to overrate their abilities and research has indicated that subordinate feedback, which did not conform with the leader's perceptions of their competency, was viewed negatively, making the leaders "angry and discouraged" (Atwater and Brett, c2002 p14). How the feedback was presented to those being evaluated proved to be an important variable and level of commitment to the organization as a whole proved to be a powerful indicator affecting how well negative feedback was received (Atwater and Brett, p15).

Findings such as these suggest that changing managerial behaviour, as opposed to the technical skills related to management can be a difficult task. Yet more generic skills which are very much influenced by behaviours and attitudes, such as dealing with people, managing change, selling and entrepreneurship and motivating staff, are regularly sought in any survey of the training needs of

library staff. A recent study of the professional development needs of staff in health and related libraries in the UK found “influencing and persuading skills” to be one of the major areas identified as a skills gap for that group (Urquhart 2005, p60). And in a world-wide training needs survey of library staff conducted by IFLA, it was found that change and innovation, leadership and marketing were the major management skills where training was required (Spies, 2003, p7). In a significant US survey of the leadership qualities desired in a new generation of academic and public library directors, the highest ranking attributes were:

Ability to work with Boards

Possession of integrity

Ability to work effectively with staff

Acting as an advocate for the library within its community and

Ability to articulate and communicate the role of the library to its community (Young, Powell and Hernon 2003).

Areas related to technical knowledge scored less highly than did these more personal attributes.

A more specific evaluation of the skill set and knowledge required by public library managers was developed by Mahmoodi and King (1991) with over 100 attributes listed under broad headings related to leadership, administrative abilities, technical skills, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and personal traits. Again, the balance is heavily towards personal attitudes and aptitudes rather than the more easily learnt skills and competencies.

Given this research indicating the skill and knowledge levels required of managers to lead libraries into the future, and bearing in mind the difficulties in relying upon self or subordinate evaluation in understanding existing effectiveness in many of these areas, it was decided to adopt a combined approach in ascertaining current skill levels in public library managers and where any training or development needs may exist.

## **Method**

In order to assess the current level of management expertise in selected city and regional public library systems in New South Wales, the ACT and Victoria, and from there identify areas of training and development need, it was decided to develop a questionnaire to be completed by both

managers and their subordinates. From the combined evidence of both questionnaires, it was anticipated that some areas will be identified by both managers and their staff as areas where there is a developmental need. It was also expected that, given the general difficulty in accurate self-assessment, there would be areas where managers felt comfortable with their skill or knowledge level but where subordinates did not agree. Existing research suggests that it is unlikely that the opposite would hold true where manager's underestimated their ability, with subordinates rating them more highly.

Given the evidence that direct subordinate feedback has limited impact in many areas, it was felt that it would not be that useful to tie survey results to any individual manager but to aggregate the results from the entire sample into two separate groups, managers and staff, and report on overall findings. This ensures anonymity and reduces concerns for those completing the questionnaire about the personal implications of the comments they are making. For subordinates assessing their manager's competence this is obviously an area where lack of anonymity can lead to less-than-honest responses to questions and stress for the individual having to appraise their manager's performance. This factor of 360 degree feedback seems to be an area where further research as to the nature and extent of its impact is warranted.

The definition of a manager was limited to what is commonly known in the public library community as branch managers, ie. those responsible for running an entire operation, whether it has two or twenty staff. Managers of separate areas within a particular library were deemed to be staff for the purposes of this questionnaire and asked to complete the form as a staff member commenting on their branch manager.

The questionnaire was developed based upon the attributes identified by Mahmoodi and King as forming the skill and knowledge set required for successful public library managers into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While their list of competencies was compiled from North American data it was felt that most of these would also be highly relevant to the Australian situation due to the basic similarity in roles between US and Australian public libraries. A subset of 53 attributes was selected from their more extensive list based upon their relevance to the Australian situation and importantly, upon the researcher's perception that a subordinate would be able to respond in an informed manner to the question posed. This aspect of the questionnaire design is one which concerned the researchers and was not possible to fully resolve. It is a very situational variable – if someone has worked for the same manager for ten years it is reasonable to assume they would have a good understanding of the way that person worked, their strengths and weaknesses etc. If a staff member had only just joined an organization, it is unlikely they would feel confident, or have the knowledge, to respond in an informed way to many of the questions. In order to try and reduce the impact of this variable, we asked that only staff who had worked for that manager for longer than six months complete the questionnaire and a 'radio button' signifying "Not appropriate or Don't know" was an option against all questions.



Two questionnaires were designed with the same questions and set up on a university web site. One was clearly identified as for completion by branch managers, one by staff. The questionnaire to be completed by branch managers was worded in the first person; thus a question would read “I help others manage change well”. For the other questionnaire, to be completed by staff, the same question read “My branch manager helps others to manage change well”. Each question required the respondent to tick one of six ‘radio buttons’ ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree” and “Not appropriate or Don’t know”. There was also room at the end of the questionnaire for respondents to add any further comments or suggestions they might have to assist in identifying training and development needs for library staff. The survey is available at [http://ispg.csu.edu.au/research/surveys/lib\\_train](http://ispg.csu.edu.au/research/surveys/lib_train). The questions were grouped against five major criteria identified as the basic skills set for any manager – leadership abilities, interpersonal abilities, administrative abilities, technical knowledge and personal traits. Once completed the forms were automatically submitted to an email address with no indication as to the originator. The results were then transferred to a spreadsheet for analysis and interpretation.

## **Results**

29 responses were received with 20 responses from staff and 9 from branch managers. The link to the questionnaire was emailed to four library systems in late July with responses received during August. The number of staff and managers potentially eligible to complete the survey was around 110.

The rating scale used for all 53 questions on the survey was as follows:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = uncertain
- 4 = agree
- 5 = strongly agree
- 0 = not applicable or not sure

Due to the relatively small number of respondents and the ability to score 0 for “don’t know”, assessment of mean and standard deviations for each individual score was seen as unlikely to be statistically significant at the broad level. However, a summary of the results is shown below for indicative purposes. Note that questions scored as “0” were discounted from any of the calculations.

	<b>Mgr Mean</b>	<b>Mgr std dv</b>	<b>Staff Mean</b>	<b>Staff std dv</b>
Leadership	4.14	0.34	3.60	0.42
Administrative abilities	4.04	0.25	3.54	0.30
Technical skills	4.22	0.48	3.97	0.31
Interpersonal skills	4.09	0.34	3.39	0.48
Personal traits	3.89	0.44	3.70	0.34

From each category, the major points of difference are highlighted below.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Mgr rating</b>	<b>Staff rating</b>
I treat all staff equally and do not show favouritism	4.33	3.00
I help others manage change well	4.33	3.42
I am active in building an effective team environment	4.33	3.37
I deal with challenging staff situations quickly and effectively	3.56	2.42
I feed back information from senior management meetings to all staff	4.33	3.11
I am good at handling difficult staff	3.78	2.68
I confront and manages conflict	3.56	2.32
I am aware of how one's own behaviour affects others	4.44	3.42

I provide constructive feedback	4.33	3.37
I am adaptable and willing to respond to changing situations/priorities	4.33	3.42

Other significant points from each category are outlined below.

### **Leadership**

**Managers** rated themselves most **highly** on

I manage change well	4.56
I value and respect the ideas of others	4.56
I maintain a high profile at work and am always ready to be involved	4.56

They rated themselves **lowest** on

I am a risk taker	3.22
I deal with challenging staff situations quickly and effectively	3.56
I have the ability to influence senior management	3.56
I have a strong influence on the library's culture	3.56

**Staff** rated their managers most **highly** on

I have a strong influence on the library's culture	4.26
I take initiative, ie. come up with good ideas, pursue opportunities	4.11
I promote the library in the wider community	4.05

They rated their managers **lowest** on

I deal with challenging staff situations quickly and effectively	2.42
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I treat all staff equally and do not show favouritism	3.00
I am a risk taker	3.26

### **Administrative**

**Managers** rated themselves most **highly** on

I hold regular staff meetings	4.56
I feed back information from senior management meetings to all staff	4.33

They rated themselves **lowest** on

I manage the budget appropriately	3.78
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**Staff** rated their managers most **highly** on

I hold regular staff meetings	4.00
I develop and communicate policies and procedures	3.79

They rated their managers **lowest** on

I feed back information from senior management meetings to all staff	3.11
I read and respond to correspondence or reports in an appropriate time frame	3.16

### **Technical**

**Managers** rated themselves most **highly** on

I has a good understanding of the role and mission of the public library	4.89
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I understand the basic technical functions – circulation, reference, cataloguing etc	4.67
I am comfortable dealing with vendors or agents	4.44

They rated themselves **lowest** on

I have sufficient knowledge of copyright and related legal issues to assist and advise staff	3.63
I meet with other public library managers at regular intervals	3.78
I attend conferences and other professional development opportunities	3.89

**Staff** rated their managers most **highly** on

I understand the basic technical functions – circulation, reference, cataloguing etc	4.37
I has a good understanding of the role and mission of the public library	4.26

They rated their managers **lowest** on

I am comfortable dealing with vendors or agents	3.47
I have sufficient knowledge of copyright and related legal issues to assist and advise staff	3.74

### **Interpersonal**

**Managers** rated themselves most **highly** on

I demonstrate trust in staff	4.56
I am aware of how one's own behaviour affects others	4.44
I provide constructive feedback	4.33
I demonstrate confidence in self and others	4.33

They rated themselves **lowest** on

I confront and manages conflict	3.56
I am a good negotiator	3.67
I am good at handling difficult staff	3.78
I am an effective speaker and presenter	3.78

**Staff** rated their managers most **highly** on

I am an effective speaker and presenter	3.84
I project a professional manner	3.74
I am good at handling difficult users	3.74

They rated their managers **lowest** on

I confront and manage conflict	2.32
I am good at handling difficult staff	2.68
I provide constructive feedback	3.37

### **Personal traits**

**Managers** rated themselves most **highly** on

I have self control and remain calm in all situations	4.56
I am adaptable and willing to respond to changing situations/priorities	4.33
I am self confident	4.11

They rated themselves **lowest** on

I handle details effectively and efficiently	3.22
I am empathic with ideas and feelings of others	3.56
I handle pressure well and try to limit/reduce stress in the workplace	3.56

**Staff** rated their managers most **highly** on

I handle pressure well and try to limit/reduce stress in the workplace	4.26
I set a positive, enthusiastic example	4.11

They rated their managers **lowest** on

I handle details effectively and efficiently	3.26
I am adaptable and willing to respond to changing situations/priorities	3.42

## Discussion

In 83% of the survey questions answered, managers rated their ability or knowledge at a higher level than was perceived by staff. This was across all of the areas of leadership, administration, technical ability, interpersonal and personal skills. This result was not surprising considering the research reported in the Introduction to this paper.

The largest disparity occurred in the category relating to interpersonal skills where a number of substantial differences of opinion were plainly displayed. Thus of the top ten items with greatest disparity, virtually all refer to dealings between management and staff.

Thus managers were rated low on their ability to deal with challenging staff situations quickly and effectively with a rating of only 2.42. This result is of concern to branch managers as it indicates that staff tend to have a low perception of their manager's ability to handle difficult situations involving their staff. As part of their jobs, branch managers are called on to tackle most of the difficult and challenging issues such as staff personality conflicts and other workplace stressors. If these are not managed well (or, as importantly, perceived as not being managed well), staff may see the branch manager as a poor leader, unable to react effectively to the demands of the position.

Managers and staff differed greatly on the branch managers' ability to treat all staff equally and not show favouritism. The difference between the staff and management's responses for this question was 1.33, indicating that for many staff, concerns over favouritism do exist even though manager's

feel quite confident that they treat staff equally. The impact that this mismatch could potentially be quite damaging for workplace relations, including team work and performance.

Looking at the leadership portion of the questionnaire as a whole, managers and staff responses differed by an average of 0.54 with staff responses below that of the managers. Interestingly, staff rated their managers higher on their ability to have a strong influence on the library's culture. This view is not shared to such an extent by the managers, suggesting that while staff see their managers as having substantial day-to-day influence on the library, managers perceive their role here as being constrained by other variables.

Administrative abilities are important for any branch manager. In this section of the questionnaire, the researchers listed certain attributes such as organizational skills and the ability to manage budgets as key points in successful administration of a branch library. Administrative questions made up 16% of the total questions for the survey.

Managers rated themselves highly on holding regular meetings, and on communicating information from senior management to general staff. These results suggest that managers do believe they are communicating important organizational details to staff through regular meetings. Staff however were uncertain that managers shared information with them, ranking this result at 3.11, over a full point difference between the two results. In fact staff rated this the lowest of all questions relating to the administrative abilities of their branch managers. Again, raising the issue of why this mismatch occurs and the impact it may have on workplace performance.

The ability to manage budgets effectively came through as the lowest ranked administrative score by managers. This suggests that budget management is an area of concern for managers (though not for staff who did not rate this any differently) and that focused training in this area may be attractive to library managers. This response may be low as senior management often have overall control of the budget; or it may be that a tightening of the purse strings is affecting how branch managers control their budgets with little room for real financial management.

The technical knowledge section of the questionnaire provided the highest scores from both managers and staff. As public library branch managers generally come through the ranks they develop many 'hands on' skills relating to general library work which may contribute to the high level of ability noted in these technical areas.

However, one area that was rated lower by managers was in their knowledge of copyright and related legal issues. Due to the complexities of copyright legislation, recent and ongoing changes to



the law and the lack of formal training that most librarians have in this area, the result does not seem surprising and suggests a specific area for professional development activities.

Conference attendance and other professional development opportunities was one of the few instances where staff rated their manager higher than the manager themselves, tending to suggest that staff see their managers indulging in what may be seen as 'perks' of the job. Managers do not agree!

The technical area generally was in contrast to the other categories with a number of questions where staff rated managers more highly than managers rated themselves; and the overall difference in perceptions between the two groups was significantly smaller than in any other category.

Good interpersonal skills are vital for branch managers in successfully communicating and interacting with staff and clients. Branch managers must be able to build successful relationships with the people around them and especially with members of the community they serve. Questions in this category centered on branch managers' ability to deal with issues such as conflict amongst staff, handling difficult patrons, and listening skills.

Out of the 11 questions that made up this section, three had responses in which staff and branch managers differed by over one point. The stand-out results were those to do with how branch managers confront and handle conflict. Managers found this the most difficult issue of the section, rating themselves a low 3.56. Of more concern was the fact that staff rated this point as their lowest for the entire survey. Managers received a rating of only 2.32 by their staff, suggesting that both staff and managers see this as an area in which managers do not perform very well. In addition, the rating on trust, with a difference of nearly one point between managers and their staff, indicates that managers may have difficulties in these often sensitive and difficult areas due to staff having lower levels of trust in their actions than managers expect. These results have wide-ranging implications for branch managers and should be of concern. All branch managers will have to deal with conflict in some way, shape or form whether it is in managing staff or negotiating with library patrons. Managers must have the necessary skills to feel confident about handling demanding situations that involve serious staffing or patron disputes, and staff must have the confidence their managers will deal effectively with such situations.

Another criterion on which there was a substantial difference in viewpoint was manager's awareness of how their own behaviour affected others. Managers felt they possessed this awareness with an average response of 4.44; staff however were less confident, with a result of 3.42. This discrepancy indicates that managers may be less conscious of their impact than they like to think and need to raise their awareness levels on how their behaviour influences the workplace.

From the above results we can conclude that staff view their managers as people who are not so good at managing conflict and less ready to deal with difficult staffing situations than the manager might see him/herself. This suggests an obvious training need exists for branch managers with regard to the skills of conflict management, effective negotiation, and dealing with difficult staff and difficult patrons.

The last of the five areas that were examined were those of personal traits. Questions in this section related to self-confidence, empathy, and setting a positive example for staff. A manager's ability to interact with others in a positive manner is crucial for a cohesive and effective team environment. To interact with the people around them branch managers must be able to display positive personal traits.

Managers rated themselves most highly on their ability to have self-control and remain calm in all situations – staff did not agree to such an extent. Paradoxically though, most staff felt branch managers handled pressure well and were trying to limit/reduce stress in the workplace and actually rated branch managers higher than the managers did themselves. This is a very positive result for managers who, while they may be seen as having problems in handling interpersonal difficulties, appear to be seen by most staff as making a genuine attempt to reduce or limit stress in the workplace.

## **Conclusion**

The results of this limited survey using a form of 360 degree feedback has supported the earlier findings that generally, managers (as do other groups) estimate their abilities at a higher level than do others; in this case their staff. It also shows that some of the criteria indicated as being most valuable for public library managers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are those where there appears to be a substantial gap in manager's and staff's perceptions of their skill or knowledge base. And not surprisingly, these gaps occur mainly in the personal attitudes and aptitudes applied by each manager in the work situation. Using the evidence gathered through this survey, the training and development needs for public library branch managers that appear to require priority are:

- Managing staff in a fair and inclusive manner
- Dealing appropriately with conflict in the workplace and handling other difficult situations; negotiation skills
- Communication of corporate, higher level information to all staff
- Training in copyright and related legal issues
- Training in budgeting and financial management

None of these findings will be a surprise to most readers. However, with this and further evidence that will be gathered over the next year or so, a more complete and accurate picture can be developed to try and identify training and development needs of public library managers and importantly, set in place longer term studies to assess the effectiveness of such training once it has been undertaken.

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