KEY PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR SOUTH AFRICAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines academic librarianship in South Africa; general trends and challenges in academic librarianship; and the higher education (HE) environment in which academic libraries exist. The authors propose that South African academic librarians adopt several key professional principles to best support the priorities of their institutions. Academic librarians who understand and respond to trends occurring in the larger context of HE will continue to have a critical role in their institutions. As libraries have continually adapted to the information needs of their institutions and stakeholders in the past, they can continue to adapt by embracing these principles:

Be institution-centric, rather than library-centric.

Use existing research and theories to develop and provide services and resources that will make the most effective use of staff and financial resources. Make assessment an integral part of library operations.

Conduct practice-based research.

Engage in ongoing professional development.

KEYWORDS

academic libraries, trends, South Africa, professional principles, professional development

1 INTRODUCTION

Libraries have changed in response to external influences. As academic libraries find ways to connect with the mission of their parent institutions, they will continue to be considered the 'heart' of the university (Weiner 2005:10).

Academic libraries and their parent institutions exist in a dynamic environment. Libraries must respond to challenges enforced on them by the political, economic, social and demographic environment in which they function. Changes in legislation, technological developments, user demands, the state of the global economy, and currency fluctuations have an impact on them. Libraries also have to respond to changes in the values, vision, mission and policies of the institutions that they serve. These changes demand new missions, goals, objectives, organisational structure, and managerial skills (Kargbo 2002:411). In this environment, academic libraries need to re-examine their purpose and justify the need for their services.

This article examines the state of academic librarianship in South Africa. It discusses the higher education (HE) environment in which academic libraries exist; the challenges they face; and emerging trends in academic librarianship. The purpose of this examination was to identify important principles that South African academic librarians may adopt for their practice. Embracing these principles can ensure that libraries have an essential role in contributing to the goals of higher education institutions (HEIs). As librarians have adapted continually to the information needs of their institutions in the past, they will need to continue to adapt by embracing these trends in the future. The trends that the article discusses are: to be institution-centric, rather than library-centric; to use evidence to influence practice; to engage in practice-based research; and to participate in ongoing professional development.

2 HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

After four decades of apartheid policies, discrimination and oppression, South Africa reshaped itself to a democratic society that embraces diversity, social justice, and human rights (Thomas 2007:71). Before 1994, South Africa supported 36 HEIs as part of its apartheid legacy. These included 21 universities and 15 technikons, technical colleges and colleges of education, for example, police, nursing and agricultural colleges. Financially, these HEIs were an enormous burden for the state after 1994. The new government drove a radical restructuring of HE aimed at making it stronger, more focused, and efficient. In 2002, the government announced that some institutions would be merged to mitigate the inequities of HE in the past. In 2003, the institutional mergers occurred as an attempt to restructure the apartheid HE landscape. The number of institutions was cut to 23 through mergers and campus incorporations involving most institutions. Presently, HE in South Africa comprises three types of institutions, namely: 'traditional' research-

focused universities; universities of technology; and comprehensive universities that combine academic and vocationally-oriented education.

Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande, announced in July 2013 that two new universities to be called the Sol Plaatje University and the University of Mpumalanga would open in the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga, respectively, with a small student intake in 2014.

Over the last decade, there was a growth of over 50 per cent in the number of student enrolments from 603 000 students enrolled in 2001 to 935 000 in 2012 (South Africa. info 2013).

3   PROBLEMS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

South African HE is not without its challenges. Prior to 1994, the HE system was shaped by social, political and economic inequalities of a class, race, gender, institutional and spatial nature. Perhaps the biggest challenge currently is that a large component of the country's secondary schooling system is still under-performing. In her article on failing schools, Wild (2012) reports: 'basic education is in crisis, and pupils who do finish school are often not prepared for the rigors of a degree, with university dropout rates approaching 40%'.

Other significant challenges for HE are the large numbers of illiterate people; the enormous gap between rich and poor, perhaps the largest in the world; the diversity of languages used by South Africans; and uneven access to telecommunications. The scarcity of books, libraries, and computers in most South African schools means that many first-year university students lack even basic computer literacy skills, let alone the high-level information literacy skills demanded by HEIs.

Many students come from working-class families. They are under huge pressure to earn a salary and support family members, which means that they perceive postgraduate studies as an unnecessary luxury (Habib 2011). With too few people who hold PhDs, South Africa lags behind other countries in gross participation in HE, production of doctorates, and research output (Habib 2011). Figure 1 shows that South Africa ranks lowest among 13 countries in its production of PhDs.
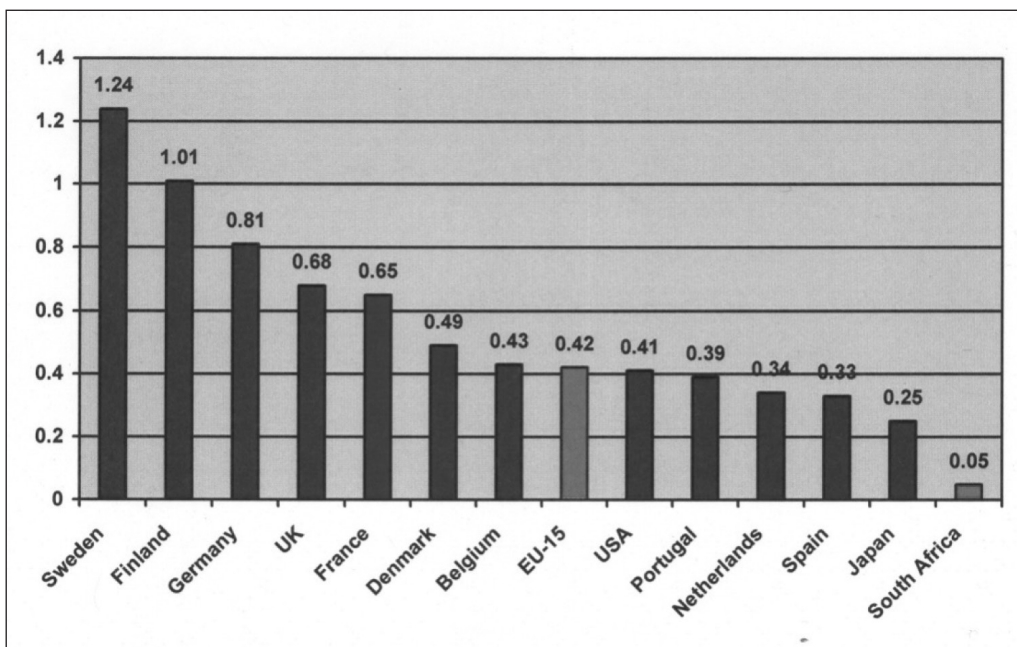
Figure 1: International comparison of PhD production rates

Source: Department of Science and Technology (2007:29)

However, the findings of a recent analysis of South Africa's scientific performance show increased research output between 2000 and 2010. South Africa more than doubled its scholarly publications, improved its international publications ranking by two positions, and achieved a ranking of 33rd in the world (Pouris 2012: 4).

This shows progress, but more improvement is necessary. To better the quality of South African HE, it is necessary to be concerned about the performance of local universities. The knowledge-information system is the key to development, innovation and competitiveness. Universities are the dominant players within this system and play a major role in the development of countries. To build a knowledge-based economy, South Africa will need to increase its PhD production rate.

South Africa's growing research output and international participation has boosted the country's credibility in the global research arena. The National Planning Commission proposed ambitious quality driven targets to increase the number and improve the qualifications of academic staff holding PhDs. World-class centres and programmes should be developed within the national system of innovation and the HE sector. A future scholars programme would increase the proportion of staff with PhDs and meet the increasing demand for professional PhDs in the non-university research, financial, and services sectors. The role of science councils should be reviewed in light of the

world-wide tendency to align research councils with universities. The National Planning Commission (2011:262) states that:

> Higher education is the major driver of the information-knowledge system, linking it with economic development . . . Universities are key to developing a nation. They play three main functions in society. Firstly, they educate and train people with high-level skills for the employment needs of the public and private sectors. Secondly, universities are the dominant producers of new knowledge, and they critique information and find new local and global applications for existing knowledge. Universities also set norms and standards, determine the curriculum, languages and knowledge, ethics and philosophy underpinning a nation's knowledge-capital. South Africa needs knowledge that equips people for a society in constant social change.

> Thirdly, given the country's apartheid history, higher education provides opportunities for social mobility and simultaneously strengthens equity, social justice and democracy. In today's knowledge society, higher education underpinned by a strong science and technology innovation system is increasingly important in opening up people's opportunities.

Urgent attention will improve the capacity, quality and productivity of the HE and innovation systems.

4 THE SOUTH AFRICAN ACADEMIC LIBRARY SECTOR

A review of the literature on issues in South African academic libraries discusses the challenges they face:

- societal inequalities;
- changes due to institutional mergers;
- economic issues due to the need for scholarly resources and telecommunications infrastructures;
- instituting quality assurance, improving service, and outcomes assessment;
- labour issues;
- emphasising information literacy;
- increasing open access;
- disseminating information about HIV/AIDS (Stewart 2007).

Academic libraries, particularly in the United States (US), are increasing their adoption of 21st century technology trends (Gerolimos & Konsta 2011). This poses challenges for academic libraries due to tensions between maintaining existing services and the need to implement e-services. It is important to tightly

integrate the web-based, social networking, and in-person experience of the library to prevent 'data loss, poor service orientation, lack of flexibility, and, ultimately, reduced ability to retrieve information' (Gerolimos & Konsta 2011).

Most of these challenges still exist today, since illiteracy persists. Schools in the previous disadvantaged areas are still underperforming. In such an uncertain environment, the success of the academic library is related to its ability to evolve quickly as the libraries' parent institutions, students and faculty evolve. South African academic libraries have made substantial successful efforts to respond to changes in the higher educational system. Among these are the creation of new library associations, collaborative consortia, and adoption of new technologies.

4.1   LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

The National Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA, http://www. liasa.org.za) was launched in 1997. LIASA is a professional non-profit organisation that strives to unite, develop and empower all people in the library and information field in South Africa into an organization that leads in transforming, developing, and sustaining library and information services for all people in South Africa. LIASA is affiliated with a number of international library associations.

The establishment of the Higher Education Libraries Interest Group (HELIG, http:// liasahelig.blogspot.com) provides a platform where academic librarians can share knowledge and experiences. HELIG meetings take place at the annual LIASA Conference.

Another interest group within LIASA is the Research and Teaching Interest Group (RETIG, http://www.liasa.org.za/node/132), a platform where academic librarians as practitioners and academics as lecturers can discuss their issues for example what do practitioners expect from academics in LIS to fulfil the staffing needs; researchers are also allowed a platform to discuss their research interests.

Library associations with well-chosen objectives and strategies can play an important role in influencing and contributing to social change. They provide South African librarians with opportunities to make vital connections with colleagues; training and skills development programs; advocacy; and promotion of the image of library workers. These associations work toward improving library services in South Africa. They represent the country's library and information science profession internationally.

4.2   CONSORTIA

The formation of regional consortia occurred from 1992–1998, providing new opportunities for resource sharing. These consortia are important because the political, social, and economic transformation in South Africa provides new equal opportunities for all libraries in South Africa, not just a privileged few. Initially, the work in each

consortium focused on purchasing a common library system, resource sharing, joint purchasing of information resources, and licensing agreements (Thomas 2007:82).

The Coalition of South African Library Consortia (COSALC) was an umbrella body for the consortia. Its main project was the South African Site Licensing Initiative (SASLI), negotiating license agreements and pricing of electronic resources. The name changed to the South African National Library Consortium (SANLIC, http://www.sanlic.org.za) in 2007. These consortia developed to meet regional needs with a particular focus on the academics, students, and researchers. The objectives of the consortia included the following:

- Promote formal relations between members to foster collaboration and networking.
- Support optimal access to information for members through regional and national co-operation.
- Promote collection building and resource sharing.
- Provide support for the implementation and management of common library systems.
- Improve information literacy skills and to share training resources and expertise (Thomas & Fourie 2006:433).

The Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium (GAELIC) was a regional academic library consortium founded in 1996 as a programme of the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis. GAELIC dissolved in 2011 due to consolidation of projects and duplication, which could signal concerns about the viability of other consortia.

The Cape Library Consortium (CALICO, http://www.calico.ac.za) is the collaborative library project of the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC), and represents four tertiary education library services in the Western Cape, South Africa. CALICO's mission is optimal usage of all resources (the resources of the participating institutions as well as external resources). CALICO strives to provide and maximise access to information and quality information services for all participating institutions that enhance those possible in any single institution, and develops additional partnerships where these will further contribute to meeting the needs of users.

The South East Academic Library Systems (SEALS, http://www.seals.ac.za) was established in 1998, by the eight constituent academic libraries as an informal academic library forum in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. SEALS' vision is to create a virtual library for the Eastern Cape to promote and enhance information literacy, education, research and economic development for all who need it. The Millennium Library System was implemented in the SEALS libraries as well as acquiring information literacy software for all sites. SEALS' mission is to foster improvement in access to

information resources, to support and enhance high standards of teaching, research and scholarship in member within the region.

The Committee of Higher Education Librarians of South Africa (CHELSA, http://www.chelsa.ac.za) was launched in June 2004 to improve library and information services for HE and research in South Africa. CHELSA's vision is to transform existing library practices to respond to the existing and new realities and lay the foundation for the development of a learning society. CHELSA strives to ensure that the HE sector is provided with optimal access to information for the purpose of learning, teaching, research and community development.

The Research Libraries Consortium of South Africa (RLC, http://www.ais.up.ac.za/research_commons/rlc.htm) was founded in 2006 with funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It was designed to improve university library service to postgraduate students and faculty members in South Africa's leading research universities. The objective was to improve librarians' research skills and domain knowledge. South African librarians frequently hold undergraduate degrees in librarianship but do not usually have in-depth subject expertise. Their training does not equip them sufficiently to provide specialised support to researchers.

The project held five library academies from 2007 to 2011. These events were two-week residential courses for mid-career professional librarians. Their goal was to improve participants' understanding of research and developments and trends within academic librarianship. Part of the obligations of the project was to write a potentially publishable paper. An added advantage was to gain professional distinction by taking part in a prestigious program. Delegates formed valuable peer networks to confront the challenges facing academic librarianship. Seventy-eight librarians from the seven universities attended the academies and 24 delegates were selected to spend six-to-eight week residencies at major research libraries in the US (Darch 2012:145–151). These librarians experienced the research journey and should be able to support their students, faculty members and researchers.

4.3   MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

In the last few years, the telecommunications field has experienced an exponential growth in network coverage, speed, and technological innovation around the world. Developing countries are well-situated to exploit the benefits of mobile communications. Levels of access are high and rising: the number of mobile subscriptions in low- and middle-income countries increased by more than 1 500 per cent between 2000 and 2010, from 4 to 72 per 100 (World Bank 2012:11). South Africa has one of the highest percentages of mobile technology users and mobile social networking on the continent. However, stationary Internet and computer ownership is lagging behind (Berger & Sinha 2012:10). Most first-year students in South Africa did not use a computer before university, but owned feature phones or smart phones. A 2007 study found that 98.5 per cent of the country's university students had a mobile phone (Howard 2012).

5   GENERAL TRENDS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIANSHIP

Academic libraries worldwide are facing substantial challenges. Two of the strongest driving factors for this situation are the pervasiveness of unmediated online access to information and a global economic recession. Although some question whether there is still a need for libraries in this environment, a recent study showed empirically that there was a relationship between the reputational rating of universities with doctoral programmes and their libraries (Weiner 2009:9). To try to address these concerns, a major professional organisation of academic librarians in the US commissioned a report to summarise the literature on the value of libraries (Oakleaf 2010).

Some examples of changes taking place in academic libraries are the massive reorganisations by some of the most prominent universities in the world, namely, Oxford (Moran 2005) and Harvard (Ireland 2012). Johns Hopkins University's medical library eliminated its physical location in 2012 (Kelley 2011:15). The role of the library in organising and preserving information has evolved into the curation of data (Heidorn 2011:662–672) and digitisation of scholarly materials (Mullins et al. 2007). The role of librarians in teaching and learning that originated with John Dewey in the 1800s has increased to one in which librarians partner with teaching faculty on integrating the 21st century skill of information literacy into curricula, course, and assignments.

The fundamental principles of librarianship remain the same, but they can be applied in ways that are more relevant to the times. Ranganathan's (1931:382) law of library science, 'the library is a growing organism,' illustrates this. Four principles prevalent in libraries that have succeeded in remaining relevant are driving substantial changes in libraries today. They build on traditions and practices of the past, but result in libraries that are dynamic. Those principles are:

1. Libraries are institution-centric, not library-centric.
2. Librarians use evidence to influence their practice.
3. Librarians engage in research.
4. Librarians engage in ongoing professional development.
5. This section discusses each of the trends.

5.1   LIBRARIES ARE INSTITUTION-CENTRIC, NOT LIBRARY-CENTRIC

This is a paradigm that is essential for libraries to be viewed as critically important to an institution. Once libraries develop an in-depth understanding of the challenges and goals of the institution itself as well as major issues in the field of higher education, they can develop strategies for supporting the priorities and emphases of the institution. This strengthens their position in competing for limited resources. This paradigm was the

foundation for an academic library leadership institute offered at Vanderbilt University (Weiner et al. 2009: 837–846).

Since it is a different way of thinking about libraries, there may be challenges in adopting it. It implies an inherent adaptability in the library organisation and role; flexibility and willingness to learn among those who work in the library; and a library administration capable of leading a continually changing organisation. Highly effective communication with the library's stakeholders to dispel stereotypes and educate about new roles is essential, particularly for the library's administrators.

Student learning is important in all educational institutions. Information literacy is a competency that directly influences learning and helps to prepare students for careers and life decisions (Weiner 2010). Partnering with faculty on integrating information literacy in curricula supports the institutional goal of gains in learning and student success (Mitchell-Kamalie 2011; Stewart 2007:4). Librarians might advise graduate students on the construction of their research (Du & Evans 2011:118); have 'office hours' in academic departments outside of the library; offer email and chat reference service; and attend programs and functions for faculty, staff, and students. Librarians can be present to the students by 'embedding' themselves in courses (Foutch et al. 2009:51–56) teaching a course; or moderating a co-curricular activity. Breivik and Gee (2006) provided many examples of libraries that have become, at least partially, institution-centric.

Open access is vital for the wide dissemination of knowledge and for the potential to create new knowledge. It is necessary for effective problem-solving, decision-making, and innovation. Libraries can advocate for open access, provide a platform for open access publications and data, and identify information gaps so that new resources can be developed. South African repositories already have impact: in a ranking of African research repositories, nine out of the top 10 were located in South Africa (Ranking Web).

5.2   LIBRARIANS USE EVIDENCE TO INFLUENCE THEIR PRACTICE

Libraries that use existing research and theories to develop and provide services will make the most effective use of staff and financial resources. They can make assessment an integral part of library operations. This will demonstrate to the institution's administration that the library is systematically allocating its resources based on the needs of the institution.

An example of this is the decline in questions asked at reference desks (Budd 2009:8). As fewer people go to library buildings, more people access libraries and other sources of information virtually from offices and other spaces on campus. Librarians may need to go where the faculty and students are or assume different responsibilities (Du & Evans 2011:118; Foutch et al 2009:51–56; Jaguszewski & Williams 2013).

5.3 LIBRARIANS ENGAGE IN RESEARCH

There is a need for more practice-based research due to the rapidly changing environment and development of new applications for librarianship. Practicing librarians are well-positioned to identify the problems that need to be solved through research. In addition, conducting research better aligns librarians with the research responsibilities of the teaching faculty (Wilkinson 2013:55).

Practice-based research could include studies that compare academic libraries in South Africa with others internationally. These comparisons can help to justify funding as well as the development of new services and elimination of services that are no longer relevant or cost-effective. This research can demonstrate the role of the library 'in strengthening quality in a higher education system that endeavours to be a mechanism for access and change across all sectors of South African society' (Stewart 2007:10).

Librarians can conduct studies that compare information literacy in South African students with students in other countries. Ongoing studies can determine improvements or areas that need greater focus and funding.

5.4 LIBRARIANS ENGAGE IN ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Programmes in library science cannot teach librarians all they need to know for the course of their careers because change in postsecondary institutions and academic libraries is continuous. For instance, Selematsela and Du Toit (2007:120) discussed the institutional professional development support needed for instruction librarians. Researchers in another study perceived that librarians lacked subject expertise (Hart & Kleinveldt 2011:47). Mullins, et al (2007), predicted that 'the skill set for librarians will continue to evolve in response to the needs and expectations of the changing populations (students and faculty) that they serve'. For libraries to have the agility to respond to these changes, those who work in libraries need to learn continuously. This can occur through:

- invited speakers;
- attendance at conferences and professional development programmes;
- personal reading and study;
- informal group discussions of professional readings (journal clubs);
- exchange programmes for academic librarians both within South Africa and outside of the country.

Library administrators and supervisors should communicate to employees that supervisors **expect** them to engage in professional development and that this expectation will be reflected in annual employee evaluations. This will help librarians to respond

readily to changes in their environments with confidence and expertise (Chan & Auster 2003:268, 270).

6 CHALLENGES FACING ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

South African academic libraries face the same limitations as their global counterparts as well as some specific to South Africa. Negative attitudes, lack of vision, the need for staff development, slow adoption of technology and technological developments, inadequate support for research, inadequate budgets, and the need for leadership development are significant problems for many academic libraries. Addressing these challenges with effective strategies for change can position libraries to be strong supporters of their institution's goals and priorities. This section discusses some of the challenges followed by ways they might be addressed.

6.1 ATTITUDE

Moropa (2010:7) in his article on transition in academic libraries says: 'Librarians tend to resist change when confronted by the reality of the new technologies, such as the Internet, Google and Web 2.0 tools. Their stance tends to be that the library is superior or better than those new technologies or they look for faults with those technologies.' Moropa also calls for 'overcoming the negative attitudes and habits'.

6.2 TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

Shifts towards learner-centred curricula, as in problem-based and resource-based learning, and to different delivery methods, such as e-learning and short courses, require new approaches to the provision of access to learning and information resources. There are several studies that 'attribute poor information skills among many South African college students to a lack of information technology resources and staff in campus libraries' (Stewart 2007:7). This has an impact on individual success in school and employment and also affects the global competitiveness of the nation. The US-based Association for College and Research Libraries states that 'the demand for technology-related services will grow and require additional funding' (Mullins et al 2007). There must be policies to ensure that students in primary and secondary school progressively develop technology, information and media skills. Libraries should continually invest in the rapidly-changing technologies so that students use them in their learning (Molaudi & Du Toit 2003:92).

6.3 LEADERSHIP

The two major shifts in the management and governance of academic libraries are the stronger emphasis on accountability and systematic quality assessment; and

the rationalising and merging of libraries in the wake of the restructuring of tertiary education worldwide. Strategic planning, empowering library staff, and effective communication are important tools for library managers in leading change (Molaudi & Du Toit 2003:93). The onus is on library staff to earn the support of their communities.

Developments in information communication technology (ICT) and shifts to electronic publishing have led to a rethinking of the traditional structuring of an academic library. In response to changes in scholarly communication patterns, many academic libraries are venturing into publishing via open-access research repositories.

6.4   RESEARCH SUPPORT

Research is crucial to South Africa in order for the country to develop economically and socially, and to compete globally. Research is fundamental to the existence of universities. If South Africa is to progress to a knowledge society, its universities will have to increase research output. Libraries face the challenge of providing research support for researchers and postgraduate students. There is also a need for librarians to be researchers themselves.

Change is difficult in any organisation. Libraries have symbolic meaning and evoke universal images of scholarly work, quiet, and librarian-gatekeepers. Introducing change in staid organisations can be a significant challenge. These are suggestions for library managers:

- Provide a clear, detailed vision of the change.
- Be a model for expecting and incorporating change.
- Involve all stakeholders, including everyone in the library, in charting the future.
- Give people time to adjust. Repeatedly demonstrate your own commitment to the change.
- Divide a big change into manageable and familiar steps.
- Make standards and requirements clear. State exactly what is expected of people in the change. Inform them of the positive effects the change will have on their work;
- Offer positive reinforcement. Reward pioneers, innovators, those who bring others along, and the early successes.
- Allow expressions of nostalgia for the past, then create excitement about the future.
- Maintain a sense of humour.
- Continuously assess change and effect quality improvement (Weiner 2003:76).

7   CONCLUSION

The article examined emerging trends in academic librarianship and considered their implications for South African academic librarians. By understanding them and incorporating them into library planning activities, academic libraries can continue to have an essential role. There are strategies for overcoming the challenges of attitude, technology adoption, leadership, and research support. Once this occurs, librarians can adopt the principles of becoming institution-centric; using existing research to make decisions about services and resources and develop innovative solutions to common problems; conducting practice-based research; and engaging in ongoing professional development.

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RETIG *see* Research and Teaching Interest Group.

SANLIC *see* South African National Library Consortium.

SEALS *see* South East Academic Library Systems.

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