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Towards developing an accredited disaster management training course for LIS professionals in South Africa

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Abstract:

This article proposes an accredited disaster management course for library and information services (LIS) professionals in South Africa as a contribution towards a solution to the problem of burning of libraries. The ultimately objective is for the LIS professional to cascade their knowledge to the communities they serve. The article gives the scenario of burning of libraries in South Africa, provides some of the reasons found in the literature for these mishaps and offers education and training as a contribution towards a solution. Educating communities through non-formal and informal approaches, targeting both library users and non-users is viewed as an important strategy to combating this problem. Therefore teaching and learning for LIS professionals is fundamental. In view of roles and responsibilities of LIS professionals in the digital landscape, the disaster management course covers both digital and non-digital context. It is designed to use both theoretical and practical approaches to content delivery on disaster management for libraries. Considering that burning of libraries seem to be a nation-wide problem in South Africa, the article recommends that all heads of LIS schools be involved.

Keywords: South Africa, library disaster management, library burning.

Introduction

There is no doubt the library and information services (LIS) profession is in transition as a result of rapidly changing information and communication technology; it is assuming new roles and responsibilities in the process thus adding more pressure on the profession that is already over worked. Pivotal to LIS professionals' role, as information custodians, is the responsibility to safeguard and preserve information resources. It therefore follows that the need for practical and regular training for any disaster management in libraries is essential given that "any library at any time may experience a disaster" (Curzon, 2006:18). Disasters,

natural or man-made, are often unavoidable and have potential to destroy library infrastructure and resources as well as society at large. They range from floods, fire, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanoes to cyberattacks. In the digital age cyberattacks are a serious concern, therefore digital disaster management should be part of the library's overall disaster management plan (Zaveri, 2015).

Over the years South Africa has experienced man-made disasters, in particular burning of libraries (Dick, 2013; Lor, 2013). Many service delivery protests in South Africa end up in burning of libraries and unprecedented destruction of valuable information infrastructure and resources. From time to time, we encounter fire disasters in public and school libraries as a result of service delivery protests (Lor, 2013). Dick (2013) notes 15 libraries were destroyed in a period of four years as a result of protests, while 17 libraries were burned down from 2005-2012 during unrests and protests (Van Onselen, 2013). This situation still continues as a school library in Malamulele in the North West Province was burned down earlier this year. Consequently, the ability to respond effectively to disasters is imperative.

The burning of public libraries has proliferated over the last few years in South Africa and people have tried to find the reasons for this behaviour. Some of the reasons include libraries being burned as collateral damage because they are located in municipalities' building which are often targeted during service delivery protests (Lor, 2013). One of the protesters on Van Onselen (2013) blog is quoted saying that they burn libraries to show anger at the government. There is also evidence from Lor's (2013) paper of a community member showing no value for libraries and suggesting to burn a library instead of a school which is a contradiction to what happened in Malamulele because a whole school including the school library was burned down. The reasons for this unwanted behaviour seem to differ from community to community.

Evidently, the burning of libraries does not occur in South Africa only, but also a problem in other parts of the world as result of accidents, acts of war, protests or terrorism. This is evidenced by Wikipedia's (2015) list of books and library burning (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_book-burning_incidents); burning of Timbuktu manuscripts, Lebanese Library, rare books and manuscripts in Mosul by ISIS (Mohammed, 2015) and many others. Unfortunately disasters caused by fire often render reclamation of library resources utterly hopeless (Aziagba & Enet, 2008) this is coupled with further flood damage as a result of extinguishing the fire with water. Moreover, after the fire has been extinguished, the burned library, depending on the magnitude, nature, and severity of the damage, other authorities are likely to be involved (Aziagba & Enet, 2008). For instance the police will be involved if crime is suspected; engineers will have to be called to assess the safety of the building; if the infrastructure and resources were insured investigations and assessment for insurance claims will have to be done. All these require some knowledge of what do and expect given that they happen under stressful and traumatic circumstances common after disaster has struck. Lack of knowledge and plans are likely to add more stress to those affected, especially when people are anxious to get back to *normality* as soon as possible.

The problem of burning libraries in South Africa can no longer be ignored, or merely be a matter of discussion, efforts must be made by all parties concerned to work towards a lasting solution. The tragedy of this problem is that these incidents often happen in historically disadvantaged, impoverished communities that need resources (information included) to emancipate from poverty and other societal perils. Admittedly the course of action towards the solution is complex with varied uncertainties but taking Lor's (2013) work further,

research has to reveal the reasons for this unwanted behaviour, including the social and political factors underlying this problem. In addition, the perceptions of libraries by the communities they are intended to serve could be established and if it is negative should be changed. Furthermore, the LIS profession has to transform libraries to increase awareness of the role of libraries in communities so that they are recognized by poor communities as interventions for their emancipation. On the more practical side, the LIS profession could view this huge problem as a disaster requiring proper disaster management. Hence this article focuses more on education and training of the LIS profession for disaster management.

Although some people may perceive this problem as acts of crime that require stringent law enforcement; proper police work or crime prevention strategies such as *Operation Fiela*[1], library stakeholders may have to provide an input towards the solution using their knowledge and expertise. While the justice/legal system may help to address this matter, other stakeholders such as educators and LIS professionals may also intervene for change in behaviour during protests. Lor (2013) views the problem as both social and political, which suggests that this is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted and/or multi-layered holistic approach from various stakeholders and parties because it is beyond the capacity of one sector to address completely. Of utmost importance is that it should involve the communities whose libraries are burned.

In November 2014, in the events leading to the 75th Commemorative Conference of the Library and Information Studies Centre (LISC) as a LIS school in Africa, a question was asked by a prominent senior staff member of the University of Cape Town: "what are you doing about the burning of libraries in South Africa? Surely as the oldest LIS School in Africa you [meaning LISC] should do something about this problem – it is a disaster after a disaster". It was as though this question/comment was directed to me as the conference convener, since then I explored the problem focusing towards contributing to the solution. The solution to a complex societal problem such as this one is equally complex and consists of many factors and may be approached in many ways. For instance an anthropologist, economist, politician, psychologist or sociologist could offer solutions based on their fields of expertise. As an educator, it is not far-fetched to view education and training as part of the solution.

LIS professionals as educators

This article explores the feasibility of developing an accredited course on disaster management for LIS professionals in South Africa, so that they could cascade the knowledge to communities close to the libraries. LIS professionals have for years been educators through programmes such as bibliographic instruction and information literacy. Research also shows that the role of an educator is inherent in every profession. Therefore education cannot be left to educators (teachers, lecturers or instructors) only. The question is what type of education do LIS professionals offer in order to solve the problem facing the nation?

Education occurs formally, non-formally and informally. Formal education is achieved through a structured schooling system from the foundation phase to tertiary education. Non-

[1] *Fiela* is a Sesotho word meaning sweep. *Operation Fiela* is a crime prevention initiative launched by President Jacob Zuma to combat xenophobia attacks on foreign nationals (http://ewn.co.za/2015/06/28/Gauteng-police-arrest-hundreds-in-Operation-Fiela)

formal education is done through organised activities such as workshops outside the formal education structures but often have target audience with clear learning outcomes. Informal education is lifelong learning acquired from daily experiences that build on our beliefs, values, attitudes, knowledge, perceptions or skills; some of this aspects compare with Dervin's (1999) sense-making process. Information literacy training in libraries forms part of non-formal education because it is often targeted at specific user groups with clear learning objectives. Information literacy that forms a component of a mainstream school curriculum would be considered formal education. Organising events that create experiences that impact on individual attitudes, perceptions, values or knowledge such as the South Africa Library Week and the Library and Information Association of South Africa Road Shows would be regarded as informal education. It is not easy to assess the outcomes of informal education and the impact it makes in communities. However, these three types of education complement one another and help to reach out the wider sector of the nation. It is envisaged that a disaster management course for LIS professionals in impoverished communities should empower them to engage in non-formal education in their communities supplementing it with informal education. The trained LIS professionals need to create lifelong learning experiences targeting non-library user groups. There is a need to balance formal, non-formal and informal education focusing both on library users and non-library users. The values and experiences of library users might cascade to non-library users.

Proposed disaster management course

Considering the current situation of burning of libraries and the "need for cooperation amongst the nation to offer a lasting solution to disasters that affect the library" (Aziagba & Enet, 2008:268), an accredited short course on disaster management in South Africa is proposed. The article suggests a holistic and collaborative approach to train to combat a national problem through an accredited short course commonly shared by South African LIS schools. With accreditation the competency, authority and credibility of individuals and institutions offering the training are trusted because their credentials and credibility are verified. In addition, a certificate is issued after a formal assessment that ascertains if knowledge and skills were acquired and attitudes changed by the participants. Another advantage of accredited courses is that they will stipulate the National Qualification Framework (NQF) level for the course as well as the credits completed. Given that one cannot ascertain when the problem of burning libraries will end, as a short course (1 week) with specific credits (e.g.36 credits) is proposed; a credit is equivalent to an hour. The training should include theory and practice as well as formal assessments to make sure it is credit worthy. It should be set at an NQF level that is appropriate for its content that bears in mind the aspects pertaining to most community and public libraries who are working in impoverished communities where the burning of libraries often occurs as well as the notion of *21st century LIS professional* in the digital landscape. Considering the notion of the 21st century librarian in the digital landscape both digital and non-digital disaster management is desirable.

It does not have to be part of the mainstream curriculum because it might not be possible to accommodate new courses in most LIS schools. In addition, the proposed course might be short lived as there is no certainty on when the problem will end. Although the course is proposed there are courses that train the LIS profession in South Africa on disaster management, but this fall within non-formal education. These are not mentioned in this article deliberately to avoid putting them on a spotlight.

Disaster management is taken and understood from the definition stipulated in the Government Gazzette of 15 January 2003, South African Disaster Management Act No. 57 of 2002, as:

> a continuous and integrated multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary process of planning and implementation of measures aimed at (a) preventing or reducing the risk of disasters; (b) mitigating the severity or consequences of disasters; (c) emergency preparedness; (d) a rapid and effective response to disasters; and (e) post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation (South Africa 2003:07).

This definition entails prevention of the risk of disasters hence the suggestion that LIS professionals are trained for disaster management to engage with their communities to prevent fire disasters. It is envisaged that the disaster management course for libraries will ultimately influence change in behaviour in communities. It starts with a formal education for LIS professionals aimed to transcend into non-formal and informal education for the communities where their libraries are based. It serves as a point of departure for the design of the course.

South Africa being a dichotomous country of two 'worlds' (the privileged and the unprivileged; the haves and the have nots; the developed and underdeveloped) with a digital divide means that the disaster management course should be well-balanced with appropriate content for both 'worlds'. While one world is facing burning of libraries, the other world should be concerned digital data security. Therefore, our digital curation programmes/courses should include digital disaster management for libraries, museums, archives and related institutions. Although digital preservation is regarded as digital disaster prevention strategy, disaster management plans in libraries still require a section focusing on digital disasters (Zaveri, 2015). The advent of cyberattacks and other information and communication technologies' risks as well as studies on digital disaster management in libraries (e.g. Zaveri, 2015) should prompt research education and training on digital disaster management in South African libraries and the African continent.

According to Rattan (2013:3) "libraries and various information centres need to take practical measures to minimize the risk of disaster and be prepared to react quickly and effectively should a disaster occur". Studies such as Ellis (2007), Corrigan (2008) and Topper (2011) show some disaster response and discovery measures in libraries including the feasible strategies LIS professionals can adopt to effectively respond to disasters. Rattan (2013) emphasizes adopting policies and practices for managing disasters in libraries; working through consortia or networks to take practical measures to minimise disaster risk; and planning and preparing for a swift response to disasters. This is some literature that is used to inform the disaster management course content proposed.

Prozesky's (2011) framework of curriculum design presented as Figure 1 was used to conceptualise the course. Figure 2 shows the proposed disaster management course for LIS profession in South Africa formulated from the literature using Prozesky's (2011) framework.

Figure 1: Prozesky (2011) framework of curriculum design

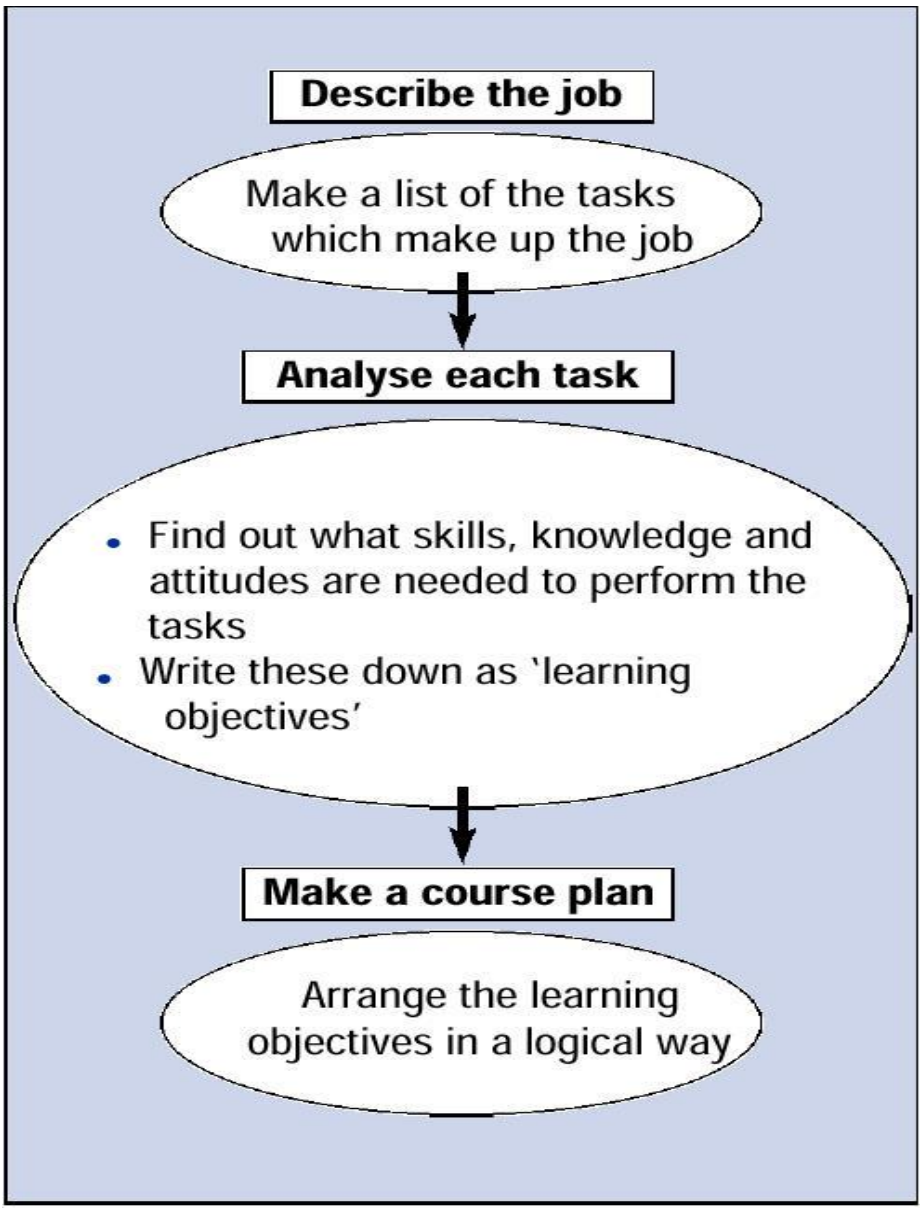
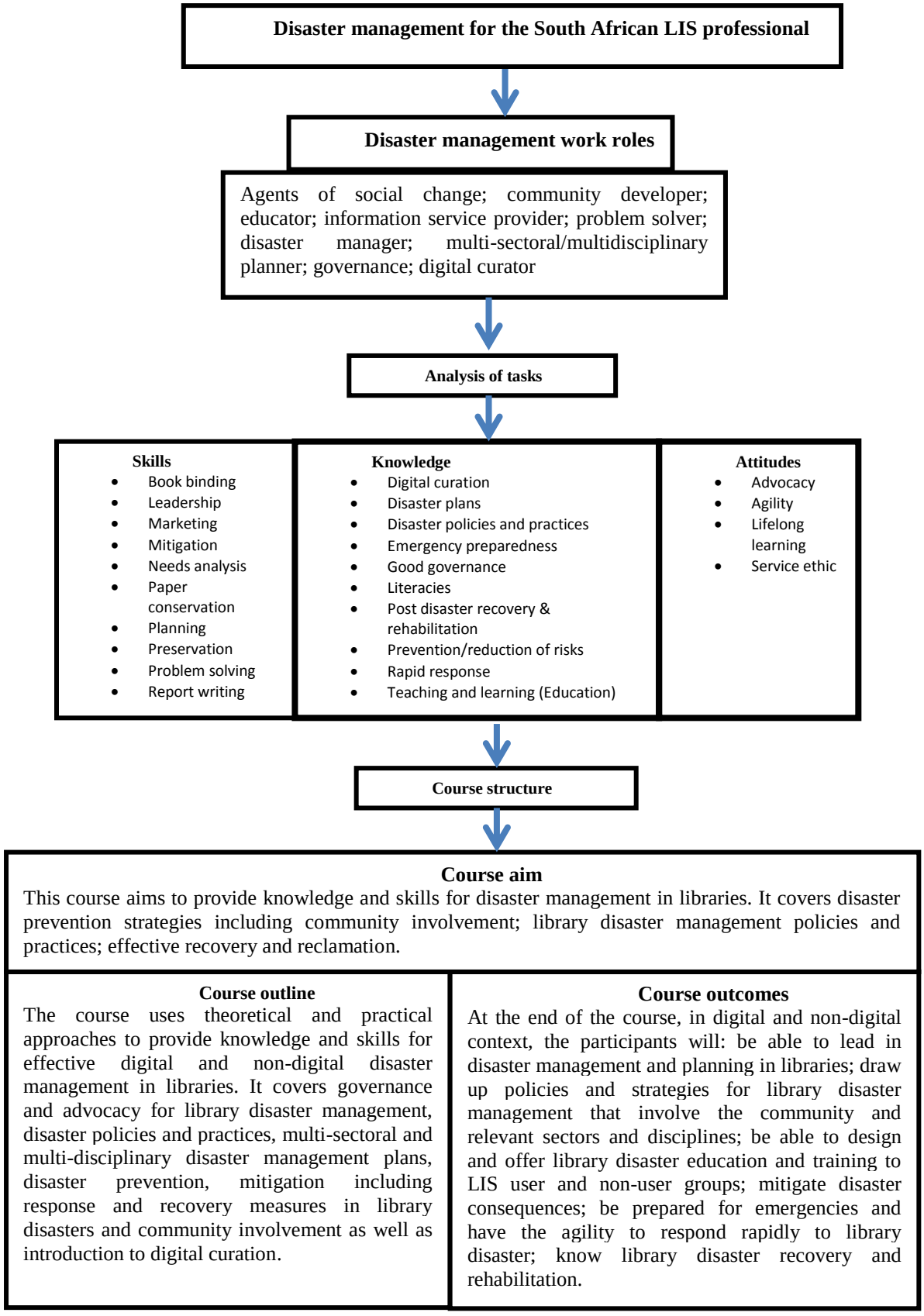


Figure 2: Disaster management course for South African LIS professional



Considering the course is part of a solution to a nation-wide problem, the next step will be to involve heads of LIS schools in South Africa to:

1. Seek support and goodwill for the course.
2. Solicit input on the content, course outcomes and NQF level.
3. Get suggestions on the mode of content delivery, necessary expertise for course enrichment and established sites of practice for participants.

Conclusion

The fundamental objective of disaster management is to prevent disasters or at least keep at minimum losses of lives, infrastructure, socio-economic and environmental harm after the disaster. As shown in the discussion above, the situation of man-made disasters of burning libraries in South Africa can no longer be a matter of discussion there is a need for a multi-faceted and multi-layered approach to the solution. It is incumbent upon all parties and stakeholders to work towards changing the behaviour of communities during protests in South Africa. This article suggests an accredited education and training in disaster management as a contribution towards the solution of a societal problem. Bearing in mind the notion of the 21st century librarian operating in the digital landscape, the course has to incorporate the digital disaster management.

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