

**THE ROLE OF THE BUSINESS LIBRARIAN TRAINING PROGRAM IN THE  
BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED BY PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

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**Introduction.** This paper intends to describe the holistic image of the Business Librarian Training Program (BLTP) from the provider's perspective in order to find the clue to uncover its mechanisms in exercising a great impacts on the business support services widely offered by Japanese public libraries.

**Method.** This paper analyzes the content of relevant documents including web pages and provides a retrospective participant observation of past BLTPs.

**Results.** A brief history of the Business Library Association (BLA), the provider of the BLTP, and its organizational efforts is given. The activities of the BLTP are then described, including curriculum, administration, certificates granted, evaluation, attendees, and the community impact of Japanese public libraries and their librarians.

**Conclusion.** The continuing efforts to provide the BLTP have developed strong ties among the librarians involved in developing and maintaining business support services at public libraries throughout Japan and have generated new values that might replace the traditional values of public library services. In response to requests from the Japanese library community, the BLTP will soon offer not only elementary-level programs but also higher-level programs. In addition, more programs are expected to be offered in cities beyond the Tokyo metropolitan area, in collaboration with regional public libraries and their constituent bodies.

## **Introduction**

The goal of our three-year research project, “*The Effects of Public Library Business Information Service as a Mechanism for Supporting Business*”, was to clarify the relationship between public libraries and their users by examining the business support services that have recently gained attention as a new way for public libraries to contribute to the local community. Our results showed that the business support services of public libraries exhibited an innovative model for solving individual users’ problems that might replace the traditional public library model focused on book-lending services [Tamura et al., 2008a].

Business support services have been developed in response to users’ potential needs and have created new values. The service will grow through acceptance by citizens and will spread through the sharing of these new values between users and librarians, among librarians, and between libraries and municipal governments. The values created by the business support services may include, for example, (1) active extension rather than passive waiting, (2) supporting indefinite rather than definite needs, (3) supporting self-help rather than responding to everyday information needs, and (4) exploring the needs of new clients rather than of regular clients. Our research project identified that librarians engaged in providing the newly developed business support services recognized the new values generated from them while maintaining the traditional values of passive book-lending services. In short, their values are divided between the traditional and the innovative services. Our project also found that the Business Librarian Training Program (BLTP) played an active role in spreading the new values generated from the business support services to a number of public librarians working at a wide range of Japanese public libraries [Tamura et al., 2008b].

## **Purpose of the Paper**

This paper describes the holistic image of the BLTP from the provider’s perspective in order to discover the reason for its impact on the business support services widely offered by Japanese public libraries.

## **Methodology**

The first author of this paper is a director of the Business Library Association (BLA), the provider of the BLTP, and has actively been involved in designing and organizing the BLTP from its inception. The main part of this paper was initially prepared by him based on the analysis of relevant documents and a retrospective participant observation using his experiential knowledge developed through organizing and managing the past BLTP sessions. The paper has been refined through discussion among the members.

## **Business Library Training Program (BLTP)**

In this section, we give a brief history of the BLA followed by a general description of the BLTP.

### ***Business Library Association (BLA)***

Established in December 2000, the Business Library Association (BLA) is a diverse organization consisting of various library and information service professionals, including public librarians, special librarians, company librarians, and academic librarians, as well as college/university professors and government officials. The objectives of the BLA, as stated on its home page, are “to apply information and communications technology (ICT) by developing the web pages and databases, training librarians who can manage them, and facilitating the increase throughout the country of business support libraries that have the responsibility both of helping the establishment of new businesses and of providing necessary information for local businesses, based on the information resources held by libraries” (BLTP home page).

Recently, the number of adult users of Japanese public libraries has increased. Among the new users are those who visit the libraries to find out about business-related information such as the establishment of new businesses and the resolution of job-related problems. At the same time, public librar-

ies are expected to be actively involved in the revitalization of local industry and the economy. The BLTP has been assisting its member librarians to fulfill these new roles. The BLA has been identified as one of the main providers of information designed to meet these goals.

### ***Business Library Training Program (BLTP)***

Since 2004, the BLA has offered the BLTP on six occasions to a total of 127 public librarians, with 126 obtaining the certificate of completion. A variety of training programs had been held at public libraries throughout the country, but none had focused on the business domain of public library services. The BLA recognized the need for such seminars for public librarians to enable them to develop new skills related to business information services. In this section, we describe the aims, progress, content, and management issues of the BLTP..

#### *Planning of the BLTP*

The initial idea of offering the BLTP was discussed at a secretariat meeting of the BLA held in September 2003, and a leader of the BLTP was then appointed. The outline of the BLTP was prepared by the first author of this paper as described in Appendix 1.

The major force in initiating the BLTP was the movement in Shizuoka Prefecture. The Board of Education and the Central Library of the prefecture showed an interest in starting business support services at public libraries and budgeted to investigate the plan. Meanwhile, Shizuoka City was planning to build a new public library near the new railway station, where the business support services were sought. It was natural to provide training on fostering the business-related knowledge of librarians so that they could provide reference services on a variety of business topics.

The idea of the BLA was facilitated by the interests of Shizuoka Prefecture and Shizuoka City, and the first BLTP was held at Shizuoka City in July 2004.

#### *Scheduling of the Past Training Program*

The BLA held the elementary-level BLTP on six occasions, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Schedule of the BLTP

Date	Place	Participants	Fee
July 8-9 and 22-23, 2004 (28 hours)	MAVIC Shizuoka & Shizuoka Prefecture Central Library	20	45,000yen
Jan. 27-28, Feb. 17-18, 2005 (28hours)	Head office of Books Kinokuniya; Toranomon Kotohira-Tower	20	45,000yen
Dec. 1-3, 2005 (21 hours)	Head office of Books Kinokuniya; Toranomon Kotohira-Tower	20	30,000yen
Sept. 17-19, 2006 (23hours)	Kitahiroshima City Library, Hokkaido	18	30,000yen
Feb. 10-12, 2007 (25hours)	Toranomon Kotohira-Tower	22	30,000yen
Feb. 9-11, 2008 (25 hours)	Kasumigaseki Knowledge Squire	27	30,000yen

#### *Time Allocated for the Training Program*

The first two training programs each consisted of two two-day sessions, which included an overnight stay. However, participants from distant libraries had difficulty in getting leave from their jobs on two occasions and asked for the training to be over three consecutive days. Thus, it was changed to a three-day intensive program.

Most training programs for public libraries are held in the Tokyo metropolitan area. Holding the BLTP in a city far from Tokyo requires higher traveling expenses for the lecturers. Financial support from the municipal governments allowed the BLA to hold the BLTP in Shizuoka and Kitahiroshima.

### *Fees*

The BLA planned to collect registration fees for the BLTP not only to recover expenses but also to increase the motivation of the participants as they had to pay this out of their own pockets.

### *Curriculum*

Table 2 details the schedule and content of the Sixth BLTP held in February 2008. We took the following issues into consideration when we developed the BLTPs:

- (1) Because this is the first training in business support services for librarians, basic philosophy and knowledge are covered on the first day of the program.
- (2) Coverage is not limited to library-related topics but is extended to the Japanese economy, entrepreneurship, and marketing.
- (3) Pedagogy is a mixture of lectures and practicums, including business-simulation games, business-reference exercises, and workshops on business-support services.
- (4) In a workshop on the last day of the program, each participant develops a model of a business-support service for a public library that might be applicable to his/her affiliated library.
- (5) Efforts are made to enhance the opportunities for meaningful communication among participants. To do this, participants introduce themselves during lunch time, and a reception is scheduled on the first evening.

Table 2: Curriculum of the BLTP (as of February 2008)

Date	Topic	Time	Title
Day 1	Orientation	9:00–9:20	Guidance for Attendees
	Attitude of Business Librarians (I)	9:20–10:50	Attitude Change of Public Librarians
	Business Support Service (I)	11:00–12:30	Public Library's Business Support Services
	(Lunch break)	12:30–13:30	(Individual introductions)
	Business Support Service (II)	13:30–15:30	Introduction to Economics for Librarians
	Business Support Service (III)	15:40–17:30	Basic Knowledge Required to Support Starting and Managing Companies
	Practical Skills	17:40–19:00	Lessons Learned from Business Support Services at Tottori Prefectural Library
Day 2	Application of Business Information Resources	9:00–11:00	Information Sources for Business and Business Reference Practices
	Business Support Service (IV)	11:10–12:10	Research in Preparing Proposals
	(Lunch break)	12:10–13:00	(Introduction to business databases)
	Practicum of Business Reference Service	13:00–14:50	Announcement and Comparison of Reference Questions
	Business Support Service (V)	15:00–19:00	Business Simulation Game
Day 3	Attitude of Business Librarians (II)	9:00–10:30	Problems and Issues in Business Support Libraries
	Planning and Presentation Skills	10:40–16:30	Workshop and Presentation of Models of Business Support Services
	Summary and Closing	16:30–17:00	Explanation of the Final Report

### ***Administrative Consideration***

A great deal of paperwork is necessary in organizing the BLTPs. To minimize the burden of this paperwork, all correspondence with participants is by e-mail.

### ***Evaluation and Certificate of Completion***

The BLA issues a certificate of completion to those participants who attend all classes and submit a final report that is assessed as attaining the required standard.

The topic of each final paper is chosen by the participant but should be relevant to the contents of the BLTP. It must include some of the participant's own ideas based on the lessons learned from the BLTP. The style of the report is open, but it must be written in the Japanese language with approximately 4,000 characters including tables, figures, and references in Japanese. It must be submitted to the BLA as an e-mail or an e-mail attachment within one month of the completion of the BLTP. The final paper is assessed by lecturers of the BLTP based on the topic, structure, organization of the arguments, and adequacy of the citations and quotations, as well as the persuasiveness and logic of the conclusion.

Excellent final reports are presented on the BLA's web site [BLA home page] and published in the AVCC Library Report [AVCC Library Report].

### ***Lecturers***

Most of the lecturers of the BLTP are officers of the BLA. In addition, we invite small- and medium-enterprise management consultants as well as knowledgeable people from external organizations such as the Japan Management Association Research Institute Inc. (for business information service), Gusiness. Co., Ltd. (for business simulation) in order to exhibit the characteristics of the BLTP.

### **Impact of the Business Librarian Training Program**

The number of public libraries offering business support services is increasing throughout Japan. Most of these libraries have librarians who attended the BLTP. Table 3 presents the number of librarians who attended the BLTP with their affiliated library.

### ***Producing Champions for Public Library Business Support Services***

Based on the first author's experience and meetings held for previous studies of business library services, we have found that many libraries whose librarian attended the BLTP have developed business support services and have attained positive results. Notable services have been provided by Tottori Prefectural Library, Shizuoka City Miyukicho Library, Miyazaki Prefectural Library, Tokyo Metropolitan Library, and Oyama City Central Library, among others.

In the previous study of our project, we interviewed librarians who are actively involved in the business support services at three public libraries. We found that some of these libraries budget an annual allocation to send their librarians to the BLTP so that they can acquire knowledge and skills in business information services. One librarian who recently attended the BLTP reported as follows:

Attending the BLTP was a stimulating experience. It was so nice to have the opportunity to listen directly to the experiences of those who were actively involved in the business support services ... though it was hard.... I attended the BLTP when we were generating ideas for supporting agriculture and farming as the next step of our business support services. Including agriculture within the framework of our business support service will enable it to appeal to a wider range of people in the local community.

His supervisor also appreciated the outcome of his BLTP experiences.

In my view, he gained a great deal of know-how from attending the BLTP.... Although I sometimes still need to give him support, what he learned from the BLTP is a great resource. The material he obtained was quite remarkable.

Table 3: List of Libraries of BLTP Participants

ID	Name of the Library	#	ID	Name of the Library	#
1	Aomori Prefectural Library	3	34	Shizuoka City Otemachi Library	2
2	Akita Prefectural Library	1	35	Shizuoka City Shimizu Central Library	1
3	Asahikawa City Library	1	36	Shizuoka City Central Library	6
4	Takenotsuka Library of Adachi City	1	37	Shizuoka City Miyukicho Library	5
5	Adachi City Central Library	1	38	Shunan City Shikano Library	1
6	Ishikari City Library	1	39	Juetsu City Takada Library	1
7	Ishikawa Prefectural Library	1	40	Shinjuku City Kadohazu Library	2
8	Itako Public Library	1	41	Sennan City Library	1
9	Iwaki City Central Library	2	42	Chofu City Library	1
10	Usa Public Library	1	43	Chiyoda City Chiyoda Library	1
11	Eniwa City Library	1	44	Tokyo Metropolitan Library	7
12	Ehime Prefectural Library	1	45	Tottori Prefectural Library	9
13	Okazaki City Central Library	1	46	Niigata City Nuttari Library	3
14	Okayama Prefectural Library	1	47	Hakodate City Central Library	2
15	Obihiro City Library		48	Fukui Prefectural Library	4
16	Omaezaki City Library	1	49	Hokkaido Prefectural Library	3
17	Oyama City Central Library	2	50	Mie Prefectural Library	1
18	Katsushika City Library	1	51	Miyagi Prefectural Library	1
19	Katsusika City Ohanajaya Library	1	52	Miyazaki Prefectural Library	4
20	Kawasaki City Library	1	53	Miyazaki City Sadohara Library	1
21	Kitahiroshima City Library	2	54	Mitaka City Station Library	1
22	Kuki City Library	1	55	Nara Prefectural Nara Library	1
23	Kushiro City Library	1	56	Yamagata City Library	1
24	Kumamoto Prefectural Library	4	57	Yamaguchi Prefectural Library	4
25	Kumamoto City Library	1	58	Yamanashi Prefectural Library	4
26	Kurume City Central Library	1	59	Yokohama City Central Library	1
27	Kochi Prefectural Library	2	60	Rumoi City Central Library	1
28	National Diet Library	2	61	Wakkanai City Library	1
29	Kodaira City Central Library	2	62	Toyota Central R&D Labs Library	1
30	Saitama Prefectural Urawa Library	4	63	Research Organization	1
31	Sakai City Central Library	2	64	Kyoritsu Women's University Library	1
32	Shibuya City Board of Education	1	65	Fuji Women's University LIS Dept.	1
33	Shizuoka Prefectural Central Library	5			

### ***Active Information Exchange through Alumnus Networking***

Each session of the past BLTPs developed a cohort of informal personal networks that are now used extensively in consulting and information exchange on business support services.

### **Future Plans of the Business Librarian Training Program**

While the BLTP has been successful based on the authors' viewpoints, two major issues need to be resolved: (1) offering upper-level training programs, and (2) offering more BLTPs outside the Tokyo metropolitan area.

### ***Offering of Upper-Level Training Programs***

The current BLTP is limited to the introductory level, which provides basic knowledge and skills in developing and maintaining business support services. In response to many requests for a higher level of training programs, we need to design more sophisticated curriculums.

### ***Offering Regional Training Program***

Only two of the six BLTPs have been held outside the Tokyo metropolitan area. This is mainly because most of the lecturers live and work in Tokyo and require higher traveling expenses if the course is held further afield. We expect that the BLA will be able to find knowledgeable personnel in local communities and invite them to lecture in future BLTPs held in their region.

### **Conclusion**

The business support services are gradually taking root, but the knowledge and skills of librarians to support these services fully remain limited. The BLTP has produced many luminaries among the libraries offering business support services and in that sense has been very successful. The Seventh BLTP will be held in February 2009. Continuing efforts in providing BLTP have instigated strong ties among those librarians developing and maintaining business support services throughout Japan, which in turn has generated new values within the public library services. Following requests from the Japanese library community, it is expected that the BLTP will offer not only elementary-level programs but also higher-level programs.

This report is based mainly on the perspective of the providers of the BLTP. We need to investigate the perspectives of participants and their affiliated libraries. To date, 126 librarians have attended the BLTP and obtained the certificate of completion. We plan to conduct a survey of these librarians and their affiliated libraries to identify the impact of the BLTP and how business support services have been promoted among the larger community of Japanese public libraries. Based on the findings of this survey, we will assess the impact of the BLTP and explore issues that need to be resolved.

### **Acknowledgments**

This paper is a part of a research project supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture of Japan. We thank the Business Library Association (BLA) for providing the opportunity to examine its Business Librarian Training Program.

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## **Appendix**

### **Appendix 1: Outline of the Business Librarian Training Program**

BLA Secretariat Meeting

February 2, 2004

#### About the "Business Librarian Training Program" (by Seiichi Saito)

Several public libraries in Japan have started the business support service provided through the activities of the BLA, and others are preparing to begin the service. "The Basic Policies for Economic and Fiscal Management and Structural Reform 2006", defined as the national policy by the Cabinet, declared the "allocation of business support services" at public libraries, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (METI) is actively promoting business support services at public libraries.

When we observe the current situation of public libraries, however, we see that librarians lack the knowledge and skills required for business support services. The provision of business-related information services requires a high level of professional knowledge, skills, and experience, as well as flexible approaches on the part of librarians.

In response to such urgent requirements, the BLA has received many requests to hold librarian training programs to enable librarians to gain business-related knowledge and skills. The BLA appointed the leader of the training program and planned its implementation.

Results were summarized as the "Business Library Training Program" as follows.

Basic structure of the Business Library Training Program

- (1) Name of the Program: the Business Library Training Program
- (2) Name of the Organizer: Business Library Association
- (3) Level of the Training Program

The first Business Library Training Program will be at the elementary level and will provide the basic knowledge and skills required for business support services to be available at public libraries. In the future, we will hold the intermediate as well as the advanced level of the program..

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