

MANAGING CHANGE - CHANGING MANAGEMENT.

Aspects of information management and some educational implications.

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This presentation will focus on the situation for academic and research libraries, but many of the questions being raised will also be of interest in a public and school library setting. The time frame given for this presentation does not give enough room for an extensive coverage of the items being raised, but only to give an indication of some central problem areas in the changing world of libraries, with a brief discussion of some of the implications these changes will mean to the information manager, or the librarian, if you prefer that term. The points raised will therefore to some extent have the character of a collection of statements, more or less supported by evidence, and added to this some "prophetic" visions as well as some personal views. I also use some examples from Norway to illustrate and underline my points. I know very well that there are many differences between the library scene in Norway and in Portugal, but I also believe that there are enough similarities and common problems to justify the use of these examples.

The 1990 situation.

Libraries both in Portugal and Norway as in most parts of the world, are suffering from hard times. We are witnessing cuts in funding for the libraries' operations, as well as reductions in number of staff. Our budgets for buying books, periodicals, and other types of material do not keep pace with the increase in prices for these items. Particularly foreign material can be very difficult to acquire in sufficient numbers due to galloping prices. At the same time we are affected by the introduction of computers and other types

of new technology, and more often than not we do not have either the economy for acquiring these wonderful things or the personell resources to install and maintain it if we are lucky enough to get hold of such equipment. And all the time we are being told that a new breed of information specialists is in the process of taking over our operations and reducing the librarians to warehouse wardens. We read about "information brokers", and we are being told that information is energy, or that information is a commodity, increasingly in demand on the international market. World wide, and particularly in the industrialised countries, the information business is the fastest growing and most widely expanding sector. And ever so often we can read in our professional journals and in journals of other professions, articles from "doomsayers" preaching disaster and death for the institutions where we work, namely the libraries. Some of these "doomsayers" have already for over to decades proclaimed the death of the book and the rise of the paperless society. Still, the library and the librarian are parts of a tradition dating thousands of years back to the stone tablets and papyrus. All through the ages we have shown that we are able to cope with the information handling of all types of media. We mastered the revolution created by Johan Gutenberg, and we will handle the challenges brought forward by the wonders of information technology and all the new information carriers based on sound, images and electronical as well as optical information storage. This is really the time when opportunity knocks, and it is no reason that we should leave the scene just because some new roles are being introduced in our play and that the audience may be changing.

Political and economic framework.

Another focus of interest should be the framework in terms of political and economical backing and the resources being offered by the society. Here we need to examine the resources that the community has allocated traditionally to the field of higher education and research. (Here we could also look at the resources offered in a public, and school library setting.) Have any special changes taken place? If so, in which direction is the development heading? All nations of the world seem to give very high priority, at least in verbal terms, to research and development and the educational process on all levels. Just read what the World Bank is saying about this in their reports from the different corners of the world. Or the reports of the International Monetary Fund, and all the other powerful and influential national and international governing bodies. On the national level we find the same thing in the government's statements about the policy for culture, education, research and development. In a time of change in libraries, it is important that we have a clear perspective of the larger processes in which the libraries play a smaller part, and that we can get a clear perspective of our own terms of reference within this framework. To obtain a better situation for libraries and the librarian's cause, it is imperative that we do understand this and that we find ways of participating and influencing the political processes shaping the destiny of our institutions. It is important that we find allies that will help us in our striving, because they would have an interest of their own in doing so. And all the time we should keep in mind that the profession of librarianship is too important to allow ourselves to underestimate the importance of these tasks. A university Vice Chancellor in Norway once complained to me that the universities of Norway were not good enough in making neither the community nor the employees and students of the university fully understand the mission and the goals for the institution. And then he added

that particularly inside the university it is important to underline what the institution should do, and not using time and energy in discussing what the institution should not do.

Regretfully university staff and students seem to be much better in to doing the latter than in focusing on the positive alternatives. For the libraries this will mean to take an active part in the steering - and policymaking bodies that are shaping and governing the universities and other institutions in which libraries are an integrated part.

We are now in the last decade of this century, and most university and research libraries, as well as their mother institutions, are in the happy circumstances of giving birth to a new breed of academic and research libraries that will meet the challenge of the university campus of the next century. Using this analogy, we can picture the universities and other institutions of higher education and their libraries, as embryos at various stages of pregnancy. Whether giving birth to this newborn child will be long and painful or smooth and joyful, will depend on forces both inside and outside the library. Factors as the status of the mother institution, the attitude of the appropriate ministry, and the general economical and political situation of the country will be decisive elements in this process.

Strength and weaknesses.

Time has now come to examine the situation. We must identify our strength and weaknesses in the world of today, and related to the development, we see for the future. By and large the libraries' accounts are showing positive figures. As a whole, the library community in most countries have fantastic collections, they have a staff with great dedication to their work, and we have users that are well satisfied with the services we have to offer. (I know that someone say that this is because the users don't know

better, but still that does not alter the fact that libraries are referred to as being "A good thing".) In this connection I remember a Norwegian colleague jokingly saying that: "I am really world famous, but my immediate surroundings have not yet discovered this". There is another observation I would like to share with you. As professionals we are underestimating the potential we have. This is a weakness, causing uncertainty and uneasiness for today and for the future, which sometimes is paralysing and counterproductive. We feel and claim that we are not being understood and appreciated, and we seem to lack the selfconfidence that often can be observed in business and industry. But this need not be so. Look around you, and don't be overwhelmed or impressed by fast talkers and moneymakers. Take courage, develop a better cooperation with your mother institution. What changes need to be made? What will have to go, in order to give room for new services and hopefully better services? And all the time look at this in relation to what is your mission, what are the goals? Our definite advantage compared to the dinosaurs that disappeared totally some million years ago, is that we are much better equipped to influence and take part in the shaping of our future than they were.

A British library colleague, Dean Trevor Heywood, from Birmingham Polytechnic, has in one of his more depressive moments developed a theory that he calls "Management for absurdity". The thesis is that for too long we have been educating librarians fit to work in libraries which we believed to be reasonable institutions. But, every day we seem to be walking around in our institutions and organisations and find on the contrary a reality that feels both bizarre and absurd. Therefore it would be better that we prepared the library school students and librarians to expect a none-rational reality with dominant elements of

the absurd. Judging from many libraries' struggle against real and imagined windmills, such a theory does not seem quite unlikely. Without going further into this I will still risk a statement: More than ever it will be necessary that university and research libraries, and I suppose libraries in general, get their fair share of people with the talents and the creativity that seem necessary to-day to master the tasks of leadership and organisational development in our changing environment and in preparing for the next century.

The meter society.

The threats and possibilities of the late 1990 will probably be best understood if we start by taking a close look at the changes in the economical terms for libraries. The formidable problem here seems to be that too many libraries seem to have a somewhat poor conception of the economic realities that will govern their actions. Traditionally we have been occupied with "free flow of information" and "serving the end user at any costs", and this normally mean that the services were free of charge. We all know that running a library certainly costs lot of money. But a library was not supposed to worry about economics. Today we know that everything has its price, and we are more and more being told so by our governments and our mother institutions. So, gradually we have learned to accept it and even to make use of it.

The new technology has laid down a new set of rules for economic thinking that is so very different from the earlier ways of thinking. Today it is much easier to quantify and to calculate time used for the searching in databases and the costs involved in this. Traditionally we have not been used to do this sort of cost-calculations. The cooperation between libraries has also been based on a sort of primitive "trading goods" economy. If I

can borrow something from you, you can borrow something from me. Today we see a breakdown of this system because the national and international dataflow has increased enormously. And that is why I call this "A meter society". We are living in times that preaches the gospel of libraries' services to be expedient and economical, and we are all tied up with machines and technology of our modern times. Some of these machines are specialised in counting and quantifying what we are doing in relation to tariffs and systems, so that almost everything we do has got a tag. No doubt the "meter society" has also led to changes in the way libraries and information-services are being judged and in what way they should be financed. How much shall each and one of us be able to have free of charge in library services paid by community. And how much shall we have to pay ourselves? After World War I the Nordic countries, including Norway, have practised the basic principle that certain library services shall be available, free of charge to all citizens. This is particularly true in the public library sector, but till quite recently this was also the dominant pattern in academic- and research libraries. Not so any longer. The "meter society" is introducing services that have to be paid for, and all types of libraries are engaged in a square dance where economy and accounting has obtained a much more dominant place than it had just a few years ago. And, I do believe that all types of libraries should be able to cope with this, and use this new economy and accounting exercise to their advantage.

Library costs in general are but a very modest part of the total costs of running institutions of higher education and research. Still they are often being looked at as marginal, and burdening the mother institution with unproductive costs. The American professor, Herbert White, from Indian University, claims that a main reason for this is that research libraries:

are far too modest in their demands for resources to carry out the work. (1) So when asked if the American society can afford to invest more in libraries on top of all that is already invested in schools, education and research, then his answer is: "Can they afford it? Surely the question is not serious. What can a nation that spends fifty billion dollars a year on pet food, not afford?" And he goes on saying that a major problem is that while society without any hesitation face all the other costs for the education - and research pyramid, the library part of it has over the years had a tendency to get the label "library cost". And so this cost which is among the minor ones, is being focused on and debated and pointed out as being not so necessary. In his opinion, and this is not the least important, the libraries often can blame themselves for this situation. Because over and over again, they have shown that they would do almost anything to keep up a certain level of service whether they get money for this or not. The "meter society" has developed in such way that the nice and quiet children in the library family still may get something from Santa Claus for Christmas, but on the other 364 days of the year the nice and quiet children usually get very little. An important task should therefore be to develop a better understanding and changed attitudes to the library as an important link in the chain of information ecology.

Permanent paper and new information carriers.

Permanent paper, or acid free paper, is a keyword for all types of libraries, but particularly the large university libraries. It is a fact that since the middle of 1800, paper production has given us millions of prints on self destructive paper. This means that all the large libraries are facing an enormous problem that has to do with technical solutions and questions of economy and investments. We are still lacking easy and cheap processes for the mass descidification of paper documents that has been printed and still is being printed,

on acid paper. While we wait for a new method, we can try to prevent publishers to give future libraries the same problems related to acid paper as libraries of today have to cope with. The simple solution is, of course, that books and periodicals of today ought to be printed on permanent paper. This is feasible. The difference in costs for using acid free paper in book production as compared to permanent paper is marginal. This is in reality more a question of motivation and attitude in the publishing industry. The cardinal argument is of course that the large research libraries today are using an increasing amount of money on conservation (including massdeacidification), and this amount will just increase, if nothing is done. Consequently, an ever increasing part of the libraries' resources will be tied up in the saving of books already acquired by the library. This again will mean that there will be less and less money for the acquisition of new books and periodicals. This is a type of calculation and argument that many publishers now seem to understand. A collective and massive advancement based on this type of arguments, should be a major task for all types of libraries in the years to come.

New Information Carriers

The book has for a long time been our dominant medium for information transfer in libraries. Before advent of the book and print on paper, there existed a number of different information carriers, like stone tablets, papyrus, palm leaves, and parchment, to name just a few. The Chinese made the first major advancement in standardisation by printing with moveable types on paper and also binding these prints to books. Four hundred years later the Western culture took up these ideas with Johan Gutenberg, and for five hundred years we have witnessed a sort of monopoly held by the book and the printed word. Not so any longer. The last two decades have given us a considerable differentiation in types of

information carriers. The book is still here, and there are printed more paper documents than ever before in history. Still print on paper is losing out to all the new media; pictures and moving images, and all the new information carriers that are based on electronic and optic equipment in analog or digital form. Today we would hardly get a true picture of the world we live in if we concentrated our work to print on paper alone. The world of today is more and more being described through radio - and television, and through increasingly sophisticated databases with access points in most homes. Here lies one obvious challenge for the library community. Most likely we will bring with us the book beyond year 2000, but we will also have to find good solutions to all our information handling based on the new information carriers. This is being effected not least in the new national legislation for legal deposit. In Norway for instance we have recently passed a new legislation for legal deposit, and this underlines that legal deposit shall apply to all types of information carriers provided that they contain information that is aimed at the public domain. (2) For most information carriers this is not particularly problematic, but for electronically stored information, this is raising a number of hitherto unsolved problems as to recording and storing this type of material. This tells us something about the blessings of new technology but also the problems that it raises.

The best and the brightest

The Research Libraries Group in the USA has recently conducted a series of workshops designed to explore the degree of consensus between the preferred vision of the future and the research libraries held by librarians and chief academic officers. (3) Over 60 librarians and officers from 41 institutions met to discuss what sort of future they would like to see for the library on their own campus, and to list what threats to their visions would have to

be overcome, and what strategies might serve as efficient and meeting campus objectives. I would just pick a few of the general observations that was made from this workshop series. A strong belief was expressed that new technology would certainly change libraries dramatically. Consequently the librarians will have to change too. It was pointed out that the librarians will have to develop themselves in risk taking. It would be like playing poker, - knowing what to throw away, and knowing what to keep. Transition and leadership was also pointed out as key words in the process for libraries beyond year 2000. This of course, raised the question of educational preparation and training of librarians. In the United States there has for a long time now been a heated debate among library school faculty and professionals. (4) There is a feeling that the library profession is not attracting the best and the brightest to the extent one would wish, and there is a theory that this could be affecting the leadership potential in the profession. In the Scandinavian countries the same kind of thinking has taken place, and particularly in Norway we have tried to do something about this in creating a special program for recruiting and developing better leaders for the profession. Organised through the National Library Office, three groups of 25 librarians (librarians already in senior positions, as well as younger staff members who have expressed and demonstrated willingness to use time and energy to upgrade themselves for better leadership) have participated in the program. We have already seen good effects from the program which has now been running for 3 years, and we expect even more from the long term effects of this initiative.

What I am saying is that all the existing educational programs for librarianship and information studies will have to take into consideration the changes now taking place in our field. Those who are not able to reflect these changes in their programs, will not serve

our profession in this sometimes dramatic transition we are experiencing. In order to have our rightful share of the best and the brightest, we must create programmes in our educational institutions, that will attract young people with talent and creativity to accept the challenge of working in the libraries of the future. In closing this presentation I return to the rationale of all that we are struggling with. Though we have got powerful tools in all the new technologies and the new information carriers, we should nevertheless keep in mind that we do not reduce reality and our beautiful many-faceted world to mere calculations and a one-dimensional demand for costs and efficiency. If we reduce our understanding of reality and life itself, and the culture we have created, to one-dimensional information based on terms set by machines, we will not be covering a number of vital aspects of lives. There are many things in our world today that cannot be quantified and described within the boundaries of data language and the new information carriers.

I am ending my presentation for you with a quotation from Dominique Bouchet (5) just to underline what we should have in focus all the time while we develop our programmes in leadership and information technology: "It is not necessarily the books, or the language, or the literature, we shall defend, but the culture. That is the complexity, the totality, that books and writing have been securing for us until now. We shall continue to secure the debate and the reflection over what is possible and what is not, that characterizes the open culture, where human beings not just exist, but think and create". Thus ends my presentation.

Thank you.

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