

Planning for Change - or Changing the Plans

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PLANNING FOR CHANGE - OR CHANGING THE PLANS

How to Manage Accelerating Innovation in Knowledge Organizations

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WORDS HAVE NO LEGS, YET THEY WALK

In traditional societies, knowledge was transmitted orally. That did not necessarily restrict the spread of ideas, but the communication was based upon respect for the spoken word. For instance in Africa, when the absence of writing was no obstacle to the spread of knowledge, the cult of the spoken word meant that speech was an important channel to communication of knowledge and ideas. That is - so I have learned - why Mali's Bambara people say: "*words have no legs, yet they walk.*" Nothing can stop them.

REVOLUTION?

For about twenty years now, we have been talking about a revolution in mediation of knowledge. The explanation - and the expectations as well - lie of course in the development of the electronic, digital situation, that gives words opportunity to walk, or travel, faster and further than ever. This situation of course enlarges the possibility for communication of knowledge. The question is whether it increases the respect for the spoken and written word, and the quality of the knowledge spread. This is the vital question also for University libraries in general, and for Technical University libraries in special. Our challenge is both to be in front of the technical development of information technology for mediation of knowledge, and to secure the quality of the knowledge which is the basis for research and education. The expectations for the Technical University libraries are twofold: First, because we are carriers of tradition of technological development of our Universities - and second, because we carry our own traditions of technology both as content and as an instrument for storing and mediation.

The balance between the quantity of information and the quality of knowledge, are vital questions also for the management of the libraries. Do we have to change our plans for the libraries radically to be in the front of the technological development, or should we realize that the situation of change is a continuous process - and has been so, both for the last twenty years, and from the time when the oral words travelled with the camel caravans. If we realize this last statement, the question is how to be able to plan for change.

TWO STRATEGIES

I think it is a question of two strategies. We must be able to change plans quickly to be prepared for accelerating innovation. This means we have to plan for change, to be prepared even for the totally unexpected. Society and Universities demand more efficient access to library services with an interface closer to the end user. At the same time there is an increasing need of quality assurance in the organization and mediation of knowledge. Our challenge is to be able to combine these two demands, the efficiency and the quality. This requires both the ability to have dreams like Walt Disney who said: *"If you can dream IT, you can do IT"* - and to be able to have realistic analyses of the situation of today. (I feel confident that it is in Disney's spirit that I have interpreted his words to be more profetic than he ever could have guessed them to be).

THE ANALYSIS

There are a lot of different analyses at present. Some of them tend towards myths, some are parts of trend studies, others are popular expressions of general developing trends. The politicians and the media play an important role, not least in the creation of myths. But also the librarians and the library organizations play important parts, and may create myths that strengthen the public opinion about what kind of role libraries can play in the future. It is important, to see the analyses we do inside the library world, from the outside, as well as from our own point of view. If not, we run the risk of protecting our tasks as such, instead of focusing on the objective that we have on behalf of our mother organizations and on behalf of society as a whole. Only when we recognize the changes in the society as such, will we be able to plan for change also in the libraries.

Therefore, I will approach the question of managing change in the libraries from two perspectives: One is from inside the libraries. The other has a wider society analytical view. From the library point of view first:

ANALYSIS - SEEN FROM LIBRARY PERSPECTIVE

Different forces in society - and the libraries between ourselves - have different angles of incidence to the discussion of the future of libraries. It seems though, as if we agree upon that libraries are in the middle of a paradigm shift. The key-words for the paradigm shift in the information society might be as follows:

- Information technology, symbolized by Internet and the concept of the digital and virtual library
- The need of official national - and international - information policies
- The need of lifelong learning
- Distance learning systems
- The balance between copyright and users' rights
- An increasing demand for making profit, also in public funded institutions

In addition to this, is also the question of taking care of the world documentary heritage, also for Technical Universities.

Each of these headlines represents both a possibility and a barrier. They can also collide in interest.

Internet and digitization increase the possibilities in general to offer better and more efficient services within knowledge mediation, for distance learning and to take care of the cultural heritage. The paradox lies in the fact that when digitization also leads to a more effective and attractive way to turn information services into goods in a private market, it may reduce the access to information. The market regulates prices that many cannot afford, including the Universities and their libraries. A common claim from our authorities that the Universities also should earn money in addition to our public funding and the problem to find the right balance between copyright and users rights, might also contribute to reduce access.

It is therefore important that the development of the libraries is seen not only as a part of the policy of education, but also in connection with the national policies of information.

ANALYSIS - POLITICAL ISSUES

The political discussions about the development of the society relevant to the areas of library politicians also have some headlines to describe needs:

- Education for all
- The need of increasing education and competence, especially in the private sector
- More and better research, to meet society's demand
- The need of sustainable development, in private sector
- Value added services - synergy effects, also in libraries
- Freedom of speech and the right to information - and the right to free basic research as part of this ideal

Also within this perspective lie both possibilities and obstacles, both for our mother institutions which we are part of, and for the Technical University Libraries as such.

Information technology leads to structural changes in society that revives the question of knowledge mediation in large. Also, Universities and research institutions spend increased time on short-term, applied research, compared to long-term basic research. This is a consequence of more private sector defined - and funded - research. Even the governmental funded research tends to move in the same direction. This priority takes load off governmental budgets, but may have negative long-term consequences. Because Universities are the society's most important knowledge institutions, we should take a more active position in the debate about sharing of responsibility between the public and private market when it comes to offer access to information and knowledge.

Information technology has given the private market new possibilities. Those who own and develop technology for networks, like satellites and transmission systems have also increasing control over the content of these systems.

Ownership concentration and economical structures create other channels for mediation than the traditional ones, with the main purpose to make profit. Knowledge becomes a merchandise with which media compete to process and mediate, where the trend is, among other factors, popularization of science without assurance of the quality and with less source criticism, and the price of the digitized edition of printed

publications that the libraries are dependent on, is set by a market with stronger investment strength than that of a public financed one. The media policy influences upon the production of what we mediate. It is therefore important that we take part in this policy making.

When information is mistaken for knowledge, it is not where the knowledge is generated, f.i. in the Universities that the choices and the quality assurance take place. It is neither us nor our universities that make money on the selection and mediation. This is a challenge for the universities that can be summed up in a few points that balance between:

IDEOLOGY AND ECONOMY

- Competition on mediation of knowledge - as merchandise
- The risk of misusing research results, when it is mediated without quality assurance, jfr. Schwartz from yesterday: If the editor could not publish the article, throw it on the Internet. We need editor's or referees to know what is quality.
- The risk of reduced quality of new research
- The right to free basic research - could be threatened when - applied research gets priority. Monopoly of meaning/knowledge channels.
- The need to assure quality and source criticism increases.

MYTHS

I have been working outside libraries for about six years. When I last year returned to the library world, entering the job I am in now, I was faced with a couple of myths, both from colleagues in the public administration I came from, and from journalists that interviewed me. They can be observed as the following statements:

- Internet will take the place of libraries
- The digital library will compensate or reduce the need of libraries as buildings and collections.

As an exercise or out of psychological and pedagogical reasons I plead that this was a misunderstanding. Internet, I said, is the proof that libraries are needed. Today, I need not swear - now I know. We have an increasing demand for library services, especially in connection with Internet and digitization.

The increasing demand for more efficient access to information, the shift of emphasis in the university from teaching as a concept towards learning as a concept, creates new demands on the library. So does the problem oriented learning, the new emphasis on project learning and the increasing awareness of the possibility of interactivity in the learning and teaching process. But why does one have to be inside the library systems to experience this? In this development, it is important that the library makes the library concept independent of storing form and concentrate on assuring the quality of the content of the medium and a better access for as many users as possible. That is, we must focus on what is the carrier of meaningful substance.

MEDIAS AS CARRIERS OF MEANING

As a literary scientist, I would like to bring some «soft» science into this technological environment.

The British author of children's books and lecturer, Aiden Chambers, once made a study among his students about how they defined the concept "book". The result was as follows:

*A book is
a sequence of pages*

*on which appear meaning-
communicating marks*

*all of which are
bound together
in an authorized order*

(Aiden Chambers)

The students gradually came to this conclusion of what a book is, that it is both a format and an authorized composition of signs that communicate meaning. When I heard Chambers lecture about his investigation, his main point was to emphasize the value of the printed book. I share his assessment of printed books, but I would like to add the point that meaningfulness can also be communicated through an electronic sequence of pages, as long as it is qualitatively assured, that is: authorized.

PROFESSIONALISM

The professionalism in libraries lies both in the ability to organize knowledge, in the skills to develop collections, to mediate and to build networks. But it also lies in the ability to be ahead of the development and to dare to brake limits of what a modern research library can be. We must contribute to a manifold of solutions and not go for a minimal set of standards.

THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY OF TRONDHEIM

As you will know from information in your conference bag, the University library of Trondheim is the result of a merging between The Technical University library, the University library of the University of the Humanities and Social Sciences, the Faculty library of medicine etc. As a matter of fact, we signed the last agreement about the new organization between the administration and the unions only last week. The merging of the libraries has come as a consequence of the merging of the respective Universities and colleges. A situation like this calls for an analysis of the status of the libraries, a definition of objectives and strategic planning.

We have had as a starting point for our process, that it is vital to be flexible in the way we organize library services - and be offensive to find new solutions.

We do not know the future. But we should not escape from planning. We should be conscious about the process of change. We do have the competence to make estimates. We are better qualified to guess about library future than anybody else.

This is a sound basis for making plans. If our guesses turn out to be wrong (God forbid), a good plan should also indicate strategies for adjustments.

QUALIFIED GUESS

- Chaos on the Internet
- Need to organise and qualify
- The library can do it
- Invitation from others to co-operate
- Increasing degree of digitization (profetic!)
- From bibliographical databases towards fulltext
- From local systems to national competence centres
- From reference work to interactivity
- Libraries are competence, not a sector
- From knowledge organization to design work
- More research and education - inside the library

The question is not whether or not the libraries will play a role in the mediation of modern knowledge. The question is where in the institution and mediation systems we will play a role. It is up to us to choose.

LIBRARY AS A COMPETENCE

Re-organizing processes also raise questions of the library's place and role in a broader context. I will give you a few outlines of this kind of questions:

- Separate sector or part of the information sector
- Media policy and/or knowledge policy
- The co-operation with IT-departments
- Professional system or an administrative one
- Interactive services and differentiating, tailoring
- The ideal of manifold
- The ideal of nearness to the user
- The ideal of willingness to change, flexibility

We have defined in Trondheim, that libraries are competence on knowledge organization, mediation and network-building. Thus we have organized the library to make the service on these tasks as good as possible. We have also stated the principle, that our organization should be user oriented.

We are also aware of, that in the future our competence will be used in other parts or stages of the communication chain than it is today. I see two main developing tendencies: One is towards centralization of tasks that have to do with Knowledge organization, to attain the advantage of large scale operation. The other is towards closer connection with the end user, both through personal contact and through digital organized and administered consultation and recommendation, where parts of the library will exist as an icon on the pc-workstation of the students and the scientists. In this perspective we will have a discussion about how to organize each library, whether the library should be a part of the University administration system, the IT-sector of the University or an integrated part of the faculties. For the time being, we have concluded in The Norwegian University of Science and Technology, that the

University library is part of the administration system, defining that education, research and mediation is the main tasks of the University and has to co-operate at the top level of the University. The discussion about how we divide the mediation tasks between the IT -department, that is the computer specialists, the Information department and the library has just started - among other things with a cooperation project on intranet-solutions.

It is a special challenge in Trondheim, both for the University and the University library, to make the University into one unity. The situation also give us a golden opportunity to see the development of the technical university library as such and at the same time as part of a broader context. The Parliament has given the University a mandate to be interdisciplinary. The discussion among the scholars goes whether the definition of interdisciplinary research means that only projects that cover more than one discipline will be given priority in the budget, or will the quality of each discipline also be the profile of the University. This is of course not only a question of whether the quality lies in the depth of the research or in the variety of it. It is also a competition of research money and of identity. This discussion also influences the work and the objectives of the library. The University has as a strategic foundation, among other goals to to be a University that stresses its active societal role and contemporary position. Then of course, so will the University library. The University has as a strategy to focus on Information technology. Then of course, so will it's library do. Thus - we have both a dream of doing IT - a vision, and a plan.

KNOWLEDGE ORGANIZATION AS AN ONION

We will continue to invest in organizing knowledge, mediate it and contribute to networking. But in the future, this effort will not only consist of data base development, technical and intelligent designs, but could also imply publishing on behalf of our mother institutions, general IT consultant services, research and education. We should invest in those areas in which other people feel they can use our expertise, even if this means that we expand outside the premises in which we keep our ink printed documents.

My vision - given that I should make use of this demanding term - close to the end of my keynote - is a library that looks like an onion. The exterior layer might for instance be researchers and students at their work-stations. Certain sets of library services will be available at those interfaces, accessible through intranets or internet. In the next layer, research librarians contribute with professional guidance to those users who find the networks and databases too chaotic, or when specific skills are needed to speed up retrieval of the relevant information, just to save time and money. When we have peeled off the next layer, we find the faculty and section libraries as collections in various media, wall to wall with group rooms, multimedia nodes and experts. The next layer is special collections, also stored in various media, which take care of the knowledge and scientific history and taylored services for special interest groups, some of them locally based, others on a national level. Some of these might be business enterprises utilizing the expertise of the library to serve external customers, without displacing the needs of the primary users. The kernel of the onion is the dispatch centre for structuring of knowledge. These centres and their services will be available at national and international levels, and they will appear as hands-on available services to the user at all layers.

THE RISK OF INDIFFERENCE

As a literary scientist I am engaged with the character and the function of a text. As I believe in the hypothesis of all stories being moral, I will end my story of today with a moral index finger:

The biggest threat against the knowledge society, against freedom of speech and information freedom, of which free scientific research is a part, is the talentless, the knowledgeable, the indifferent. The indifference is worse than evil resistance and opposition, said the human rights' advocate Elie Wiesel. The research libraries as the future mediators of knowledge must be more engaged in being one of many buffers against indifference and «research as entertainment».

PLANNING FOR CHANGE - AND CHANGING THE PLANS

Today - all over the world one could say that *words have wings - and they fly*. Such a saying, is based upon the same acknowledgment about the importance of spreading the news and the power to be heard, as the Bambari peoples proverb about words walking without legs. The difference lies in the ways ideas travel - and in the expectations of what might be possible. If we are able to combine the flying visions and to walk without legs, we might succeed. In other words, to answer the question in the title of my keynote: we must be planning for change in a way that secures our quality ideals, but be prepared to change our plans to be efficient.