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Building Library Collections in the 21st Century: The New Organization Librarian

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A new political organization is being formed in Washington, DC, according to the will of the populace. A new economic order is coming into being through a series of financial cataclysms, like dominoes, each falling down upon the other. How these events will specifically affect the university library and public library, and the acquisitions and collection development activities within them is not at all clear. The economic side of things does not bode well for anyone for a while, whereas government policy may again favor education and research, most definitely scientific research. There will not be enough money to go around, and belt-tightening looms for us now. Staffing will freeze or be cut back. Most likely work for the library will not decrease, and whereas this economy may affect student loans, the lifeblood of many college students, credit for this purpose may actually loosen up through new government policy and even stimulus money. Public libraries will be swamped as they usually are in times of unemployment, but local and state funding may not be able to provide sufficient support for expanded services.

What does all this have to do with the library as an organization and the librarian within that organization? Some of the worst features of library management and management in general in recent years have, in my opinion, arisen from ill conceived reorganizations and the adoption of principles taken from heavily promoted management books. Often the result from these sweeping reorganizations is plummeting staff morale, emphasis on process rather than product, endless meetings, and an eventual return to the status quo, with the books quietly taking their places on library office shelves. These library reorganizations usually arise during flush times when there is enough money and staffing to bring forth the changes without the essential activities of the library not be too adversely affected. Time will be wasted. I use the term organization rather than library because library vendors are also susceptible to these same wrong turns management programs.

Mind you, these efforts are usually meant to improve library and vendor functioning through a recognition that change is necessary for the library to survive as a central organization in a university, town, or a vendor as a major player. Unless the change, reorganization or simple changes are due to a real problem, deficiency, or dyed in the wool entrenchment, or unless they are really well-examined and enacted, no good will come of it. And when the changes are for change itself, or for the library to appear *au courant*

with its library peers it is even worse. During normal economic times reorganization reflects a library involved in the continuous improvement process. In an economic time like we are having and are heading towards, as inexorably as the planet is to global warming, in which non-profits are amongst the most vulnerable players, we need to be operating at top efficiency, and this requires strong leadership, a clear reporting structure, accountability, and high staff morale. High staff morale comes by showing regard for the work of all staff, and working towards retaining them through positive reinforcement. People don't mind working hard if they are treated fairly.

New ideas in the management of libraries and forms of reorganization are positive. The model of the flattened hierarchy and the formation of teams to perform all library functions are examples. Teams made up of those trained in the tasks and familiar with them, and those not at all, generally do not succeed. However, nearly every library I know now has interdisciplinary teams that deal with specific in-between areas and short term projects. They do succeed because participation from different areas of the organization are vital to the success of what are critical tasks. Projects such as a massive collection shift might take a shorter term group, and one concerning digital initiatives will be ongoing, because there are more projects all the time.

There are also those libraries and vendors where nothing ever changes and the strides in frequent adoption of superior automation and digital materials, databases, archives and the metadata to access them that are the norm elsewhere simply pass them by. This is even more dangerous for the organization than continual experimentation. It is suicidal because the library will be bypassed altogether in the university and the town, and the vendor in the marketplace and the conference exhibit hall. **Google Scholar** and **Google Books** make it clear that enacting important new technologies and communicating this to the university or public is essential. The style of management that confidently creates and embraces a plan that emphasizes basic competence, to the point of recognizing faults, and seeking collaborative help to correct them from our constituents, as well a determination to be a an early adapter of new technology is on the right track. Becoming the acknowledged leader in enhanced catalogs, advanced search engines, digital archives and metadata access programs and a force with which to be reckoned in the library grant receiving arena are examples of what good management wants to achieve, and needs to achieve to get and continue to get the financial support to do what they are doing.

The competence component and asking for help method can come from effective surveying

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Booklover
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These words are so intensely magical to this booklover that I read the beginning of this book on a regular basis. And I wonder what book (or books) so affected me by its (their) intensity or will in the future. Chasing the book through the twist and turns of its influence on **Osman's** new life keeps the reader on a page-turning edge.

In **Nora Ephron's** book *I Feel Bad About My Neck* she questions: "Does anyone read **Lessing's** *The Golden Notebook* anymore?" **Doris Lessing**, born in Persia in 1991, is self-educated and won the **Nobel Prize** in 2007. I am so intrigued with this comment that I go immediately to the library to check out **Lessing's** novel published in 1962. Many women read this book in the 60's believing it a "trumpet" for women's liberation. Yet, **Lessing** had another theme in mind: breaking down so one can heal. Her central character, **Anna Wulf**, has authored *Frontiers of War* and lives on the royalties. To calm the chaos in her mind she chronicles her thoughts in four

different colored notebooks. She is chasing her chaotic thoughts and finally synthesizes them in the golden notebook. **Lessing** wanted to write a book about the problems of an author. She uses the chaos created by the problem of writer's block "to break certain forms of consciousness and go beyond them." She even dealt with her own emerging contradictory beliefs and ideas. It seems her chaos became the book's.

Now to the con. At any point the opportunity exists to be profoundly affected by simple words woven to intrigue. The con created in 1984 by **Golding** in *The Paper Men*, a year after he won the **Nobel Prize**, is such an opportunity. **Wilfred Barclay**, an English author of renowned with a taste for the spirits is chased, stalked, and harassed by **Rick L. Tucker**, a young professor desiring to write **Barclay's** biography. **Golding** deliciously writes the chaotic chase to the con. One comment describes the end as "splendid" and I agree. This most unique ending places this novel in the must read category.

Have I conned you into a chase through the chaos of three books? 🐦

such as **LibQual** which when performed year after year reflects finely targeted needs coming from the university population, suggestions for improvement and acknowledgement of the strengths of the library's approach. The emphasis now on measurement of performance through statistical measurement and metrics is not just a new trend. It speaks clearly to those in charge to whom understanding the nuances of each function is not necessary, but who need to be able to recognize the relative success or failure of the library, within the larger organization, and its components through well presented numbers. It is a business-like approach which is necessary where money is involved and funds are tight. The effective presentation of these numbers is essential to achieve the required objective.

Listening at every level to what users perveice as faults and strengths is one managerial technique that produces results. Librarians learn what people think, and have the chance to change that thought. This kind of thing comes from getting out of the library, getting involved in non-library activities and contacts not assigned. And how does this happen, short of frog-marching staff out the doors and into the food court with notebooks and pencils? It comes from high staff morale from which arises, naturally, involvement in the organization, university and town. Some of this takes the form of formal contacts, getting put on university wide committees, increased information literacy offerings for university staff and faculty, and informal ones such as asking and listening.

One of the most productive ways to manage a library is to produce good staff morale. At all times good staff morale means getting a lot more from staff, for relatively little. But in these hard times, without it, services will suffer. The fear of job loss will do a lot to keep employees on the ball, but real success comes from putting one's heart into it and that can't be faked.

Many readers are probably familiar with the comic strip **Dilbert**. The dysfunctional staff who illustrate all the worst aspects of an organization, and the pointy-haired boss who is clueless are unfortunately not as ridiculous as they should be. The boss is computer il- literate, in a computer company, that it takes **Dilbert** to discover that his computer isn't working because it is unplugged. Out of touch, inept management happens in all organizations including libraries.

What is good management and a good organization? I went back to what I learned in library school (**Indiana University**). It turns out that a course built around the ideas of **Peter F. Drucker** was about as good of a model of a management style as one would wish. He invented management. His thoughts and ideas, both written and taught are considered as sound as they ever were and are based on common sense and uncommon wisdom of a great Renaissance man. He came up with the idea that workers should be treated as assets not liabilities, what everyone knows is frequently wrong, and if you keep doing what worked in the past, you are going to fail. Read *A Class With Drucker: The Lost Lessons of the World's Greatest Management Teacher*. Written by **William A. Cohen**, and published by AMACOM in 2007.

@Brunning: People & Technology

At the only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

No Shelf Required:
Talking with Sue Polanka

Meet **Sue** for the first time and you know, immediately and instinctively she's passionate about libraries. She is bright, articulate, focused. By day, she is head of Reference Services at **Wright State University**. By night, she is super-blogger, with compelling interest in all things library but especially eBooks. **@Brunning** got some of her thoughts before she headed for the **ACRL Conference** in Seattle.

@Brunning: Sue, your blog, No Shelf Required, is a blog about eBooks, librarians, and publishers. Why blog about eBooks?

SP: I've been fascinated with eBooks since **NetLibrary** launched the first one 10 years ago. After writing several articles and presenting at a couple of conferences about eBooks I decided to start a blog on the topic. I wanted to provide a resource for finding and sharing information about ebooks.

@Brunning: Are eBooks better than print books?

SP: That depends on the book. I believe that reference books, technical manuals, STM resources, and some textbooks are better in electronic format than print because they are mobile and can reach our users wherever they are. Additionally, eBooks are frequently better for those with disabilities, as the format of the material can be adapted easier.

But, when it comes to reading my children bedtime stories or carrying the trashy paperback novel to the beach, or highlighting a textbook for a class, I definitely want the feel of pulp between the fingers. But in the end, I read much more in electronic form than print.

@Brunning: Today there are many technical platforms for eBooks. Why is this and should it be this way?

SP: Why? Because the publishers want it that way. They want the freedom to express their brand, content, and features in a unique manner and not be tied to someone else's interface. Publishers also want to tie together journal, eBook, and other content into an information portal. I don't mind the amount of interfaces available, as long as each is open url compliant down to the lowest level of granularity and is compatible with other standards to maintain easy linking in and out. One exception to this is with reference sources. I want them in one platform so that during library instruction or a reference transaction I can search one interface.

@Brunning: Recently you moderated a panel of library vendors about single point of access. Did they answer any of your questions to your satisfaction?

SP: Well, of course not or I'd have my dream of a single point of access for reference! They cited technical and political barriers, budget issues, and resistance of libraries to move to eBooks as reasons against this. But hey, they compete against one another in the marketplace, so what advantage do they see of merging their content with other publishers? I would argue that usage would increase which could impact sales in a positive way.

@Brunning: ATG readers, though sensitive to access issues, are especially sensitive to pricing. I'm not sure any of us understands the many pricing models eBook publishers offer. What is your take on this?

SP: eBook pricing is not a one size fits all approach and it probably never will be. Publishers have to remain flexible with pricing models in order to sell their products to a variety of markets, at least until the prices stabilize. Despite the ten year history, eBooks are still in their infancy. The technology behind the content and interfaces is expensive. In order to recoup these new costs, eBooks are priced higher. Since some schools can't afford the subscription or 24/7 unlimited access business model, others must be offered in order to sell the books. Plug here: There is a nice article explaining eBook and print pricing on the NSR blog.