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Uptight in Library Land: A Confirmation of Stress In South Carolina Academic Libraries

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The Market Power of Publishers from page 26

"The nature of the [scientific publishing] industry is highly unlikely to change." This **Morgan Stanley Equity Research** report — which relates to the merits of investing in Reed Elsevier stock — goes on to state that, "The nature of the scientific publishing industry will not change any time soon, in our view, despite the attempts of organizations such as **SPARC** to encourage academics to publish their research directly on the internet and to encourage the boards of individual journals to defect from commercial publishers to not-for-profit publishers. Libraries and academics have been trying for over a decade to develop new ways of spreading academic knowledge and research, but the barriers to entry the incumbent journals enjoy are just too high (loyal readership, brand recognition, boards of academics) and the value proposition are just too high (they bring order to an anarchic process, the development of knowledge).

So, are the Brits right or is **Morgan Stanley**? Will the nature of scientific publishing change in a fundamental way and in a fast enough timeframe to assure that market power cannot be exercised in a way that will operate against the public interest? You be the judge.

But wait! Don't answer that question yet! Here's a late breaking development. On October 18, 2002, **Wolters Kluwer** agreed to sell its academic publishing unit to private equity companies **Candover** and **Cinven** for 600 million euros. You may not be familiar with

the names of these two companies, but they are no strangers to the publishing world. **Cinven** acquired **Vivendi Universal Publishing** in April 2002 and once owned **Routledge**, which was subsequently acquired by **Taylor and Francis**. **Cinven** is also invested in **Newsquest** and **IPC Media**. **Candover** has investments in British publishers **Regional Independent Media**, **Midland Independent Media**, **Centaur Publications** and book publisher **Orion**.

So, as long as we are talking about publishing companies, let's ask what impact this deal might have. The current head of **Kluwer Academic Publishers**, **Peter Hendriks**, is quoted as saying, "It is our intention to maintain the pre-eminent status of our publications by continuing to pay close attention to meeting the needs of our authors, librarians, and readers and ensuring our on-line delivery platform is reliable."

What do the other new owners say? "KAP is a high-quality business operating in a niche sector with high barriers to entry," **Candover** director **Simon Leefe** said. "The scientific, technical and medical information publishing industry enjoys sustainable growth throughout the economic cycle, and we are backing a management team with solid plans for both revenue and margin growth."

How will this "revenue and margin growth" occur? **The Financial Times of London** reports in an October 19, 2002 edition, "The deal raised expectations that **Candover** and **Cinven** would create a dedicated scientific publishing business, possibly involving a separate bid for **BertelsmannSpringer**, the scientific arm of

the **Bertelsmann** media group." If so, the acquisition might increase **Kluwer's** market power. Or maybe not.

Based on the definition of "market power" and the analysis we have seen used by the U.K. antitrust authorities, do publishers have market power? All 2,048 of them? (The **Morgan Stanley** report lists the top 20 publishers and notes that there are another 2,028 entities that publish one or two journals each.) Just the top 20? 10? 5? And how about that rat brain lesion journal?

If the Brits are right that there are (or soon will be) effective constraints on publisher market power, then the competitive process should sort itself out in the mid to long run. But if the **Morgan Stanley** report is right (i.e., "The nature of the scientific publishing industry will not change any time soon," the "serious concerns" noted by the U.K.'s **Office of Fair Trade** will likely continue indefinitely.

Why is there such a discrepancy? Why does the U.K. enforcement agency see beneficial effects from **SPARC** and similar projects that are wholly discounted by **Morgan Stanley**? Perhaps the U.K. **Office of Fair Trade** sent someone to attend the **United Kingdom Serial Group's 25th Annual Conference and Exhibition** in mid-April of this year. A report on that conference (published in the October issue of *The Charleston Advisor*) says that a representative of **SPARC** made a presentation about the group's efforts and indicated that it was "taking credit for stemming price increases for *Tetrahedron Letters*, thanks to its competitive efforts."

You be the judge.

Uptight In Library Land: A Confirmation of Stress In South Carolina Academic Libraries

by Edwin O. Merwin, Jr. (USC-Salkahatchie; Phone: 843-549-6314 x.327) <emerwin@gwm.sc.edu>

One does not have to be a lion tamer, frontline soldier, or law enforcement officer to encounter stress while on the job, and my research — along with 29 years' experience — shows that librarians have their share of work related stress. A perusal of library literature does not offer much help. Apparently this topic is not widely discussed, at least in print. A recent work on the subject actually ranks our profession as one of the most stress-free, i.e., number seven from the bottom, out of a possible 250 (Krantz 1999). While a *little bit* of stress can be productive, the question of when a person's stress level moves from help to hindrance can be crucial to the success of the organization of which that person is a part.

Stress may be defined as "our response to

events that disrupt, or threaten to disrupt, our physical or psychological functioning" (Baron 97). **Charles Bunge** defines stress as:

"...a person's physiological and psychological reaction to a challenge or demand that is placed upon him or her...For most people most of the time, our reactions to challenges and demands are part of the joy and verve of our lives...To the extent that our reactions to challenges and demands are continually or severely painful, we can say that we have 'distress', 'strain', or stress as it is commonly understood" (Bunge 87).

With this in mind, one might ask where and how the residents of library land experience such "disruption."

To address this question I conducted a survey entitled "Librarians and Stress." I mailed the following document, along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope, to 35 academic librarians in South Carolina. On several questions I asked participants to check all that applied, with the result that percentages do not always add up to 100%. The response rate, or number of items returned, was 94%.

1. My job is (please check one):
 Head Librarian____
 Circulation Librarian____
 Reference Librarian____
 ILL Librarian____ Other____
2. Do I ever feel stressed while at work:
 Yes____ No____

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3. Is this work related stress caused by (please check all that apply):
Supervisors___ Coworkers___ Supervisees___ Patrons___

4. Is this work related stress a result of (please check all that apply):
Constantly having to learn new procedures___
Constantly having to adapt to new technology___
Too much work and not enough time in which to do it___
Tasks are assigned minus the necessary authority to accomplish the assignments___
5. Is my level of stress constant from day to day? Yes___ No___
6. How do I find relief from work related stress (please check all that apply): I talk with sources of stress___
I avoid object(s) and/or person(s) causing stress, whenever possible___
I seek physical exercise while at, or away from, work___
I seek spiritual relief while at, or away from, work___
I talk/confide with a coworker, friend, and/or family member___
I have used, or am presently using, professional counseling___
Other___

60% of the respondents in the first question were head librarians, or their equivalent. The next largest category was reference librarians, at 5%. Finally circulation librarians represented 3% of the respondents.

Upon receiving my questionnaire, one head librarian distributed copies to several members of the staff. Although I did not request this, I certainly appreciated the added input.

In the second question — Do I ever feel stressed while at work? — 77% of the respondents answered yes. This seems to contradict a research study done in England that found that librarians have a stress level of 2.0, compared with miners at 8.3 and construction workers at 7.5 (Bunge 87).

In response to question 3, 49% considered patrons as the primary source of stress, followed closely by supervisees (46%), supervisors (37%) and, finally, coworkers (29%). It is interesting to note that “problem patrons” are the number one point of stress, while the category of coworkers is well behind. All of us who have dealt with “I know I returned that book,” “is this all you have in the library on my subject,” “has my interlibrary loan come in yet,” and “why do I have to pay for copies when I have already paid a substantial sum to enroll here,” can sympathize and empathize with this finding.

The fourth question addressed some non-human sources of job-related stress. Not surprisingly our respondents indicated that “too much work, not enough time” (57%) was a big factor at work, while the next biggest area was constantly learning new technology (29%), followed by constantly learning new procedures (20%). The least effect came from “having tasks assigned, minus the authority to accomplish the assignments (9%). This last is not surprising since the overwhelming number of our respondents held the top position in their library. But what are worth noting are the second and third percentages. Yes, it is certainly necessary to keep up with as many updates as a limited budget will permit, but at some point a perception of constant change (even though in reality this may be an exaggeration) may lead to a lowering of morale, accompanied by a decrease in productivity. I am sure many of us have heard colleague’s comment that the job would be much easier if the computer department would stop introducing software updates every six months!

The fifth question asked participants if their levels of stress were the same from day to day? An overwhelming 74% said yes (17% answered no). While it can be difficult for laymen to actually define their levels of stress, it does not take a psychologist or psychiatrist to realize that a degree (no pun intended) of stress exists in all work environments. I say “all” even though one of my respondents stated that no stress exists on his/her job! I tend to believe this respondent is in an enviable position, especially when we return to the study conducted by C. Bunge in which he found:

Special librarians did offer somewhat more statements concerning stress from ‘high status’ patrons who fail to recognize or respect their expertise and skill. Academic librarians report that they are frustrated at being treated like second-class citizens...while public librarians report stress from not being respected at City Hall or by being thought to get paid for reading books (Bunge 87).

Just because we do not feel stress, doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist in our workplace. As with thresholds of pain, stress has to reach a certain level before person A is aware of its existence, while person B becomes extremely nervous the minute the word stress is mentioned in a conversation. Some workers actually thrive on stress. They enjoy constantly meeting deadlines and/or making daily decisions that may critically affect operations, events, and even people’s lives. But whether we thrive in high-pressure situations or adapt to our daily stress by exercise, meditation, or listening to music, the work related stress, at some level, is present. The next question in our survey touched on some of these efforts at personal stress reduction.

In question six participants were asked to indicate, by checking all applicable choices, how they dealt with their stress:

- I talk with source(s) of stress
- I avoid object(s) and/or persons(s) causing stress...
- I seek physical exercise while at, or away from, work
- I seek spiritual relief while at, or away from, work
- I talk/confide with a coworker, friend, and/or family member
- I have used, or am presently using, professional counseling
- Other

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Edwin O. Merwin, Jr.

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Name: Edwin O. Merwin, Jr.

Born & Lived: Born in Charlotte, NC. Lived in Westchester, NY, and later in northern New Jersey, before returning to my "southern roots" in July, 1983; when I moved to my present residence of Denmark, SC.

Family: I have a mother (**Florence Merwin**) and sister (**Deborah Merwin**) presently living on Fripp Island, SC. I also have a sister (**Harriet DiChiara**) who lives with her husband (**Fred**), in Ivyland, PA.

Professional Career and Activities: I am presently employed as Assistant Librarian/Assistant Professor by the **University of South Carolina Salkehatchie**, where I manage the Peden McLeod Library; located in Walterboro, SC.

I am a member of:

- The American Library Association
- South Carolina Library Association
- Sigma Tau Delta

In addition to my article on "Stress..." I have written an article "Retention of Student Assistants In a Small Academic Library" and "Research Libraries and the USA Patriot Act."

On October 25, 2002, I participated in a presentation entitled "Peer-to-Peer ILL with Iliad," given at the **SCLA/SELA 2002 Joint Conference** in Charleston, SC.

Within the University system, I am presently a member of the Regional Campuses Faculty Senate. I also publish a weekly campus newsletter (*Salk Talk*) in both electronic and paper format.

In My Spare Time: In my spare time I enjoy tennis, beach combing, reading, and singing in the Bamberg Co. Choral, of which I am a founding member.

Favorite Books: I enjoy reading mystery books by such authors as **Dorothy Gilman**, **Laura Childs**, **Lilian Jackson Braun**, **Mickey Spillane**, and **Wilkie Collins**. I have also very much enjoyed the various "*Mitford*" books by **Jan Karon**.

Philosophy: The words of my late father (**Edwin O. Merwin**) guide me in many situations: "Don't fight the problem."

How/Where do I see the industry in five years: Contrary to the view of some of my colleagues, I do not anticipate the demise of "hard copy" books, journals, etc. Paper, especially acid-free paper, will be with us for a long time to come. In terms of research (high school, college, professional/scholarly) I see expanded use of information in electronic format. This is especially true of reference materials, where viewing the *Oxford English Dictionary* on a PC screen is much less cumbersome than sitting with a volume at a table. In the area of science and medicine, because information in these areas is almost obsolete when it is published, I see paper journals and books being totally replaced with electronic sources; this is more the exception, than the rule. I say again, paper will not go away; just look into any professor's office!

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Not surprisingly, those selecting the last choice, (based on the "Comments..." section that followed) gave music as the principle source of stress relief.

Earlier I mentioned that some people actually thrive on various levels of stress. Now let me introduce another concept, that of people who do not like the stress associated with their jobs, but still feel that in a certain sense they are helped by it. For example, the people who wake in the morning knowing they must face another day of "demanding patrons," indecisive or domineering supervisors, and possibly a longer than usual day because of possible staff shortages, recognize that this is the price they must pay so that monetary expenses *outside* the job can be met. To state this more succinctly, the morning riser knows that if he/she doesn't show up for work, the job will cease.

Based on the preceding survey, all libraries should not only recognize that job-related stress exists in all positions, to varying degrees, but that efforts should be made to reduce stress buildup. The working atmosphere will be more pleasurable and productive if the overall level of stress is monitored, and when necessary, addressed. Furthermore, there is a correlation between unrelieved stress and "a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment," or in other words burnout (Maslach, et al 97). This latter, more serious stage can lead to high staff turnover rates and significant lowering of morale. Some suggestions follow:

- Encourage both management and staff to take advantage of short breaks once or twice a day, and try to avoid "talking shop" during these temporary departures from the front lines.
- Hold staff meetings periodically (possibly once a month) to give employees a forum to discuss, in addition to the usual library business, matters of procedure, work load, or "problem patrons."
- Occasionally compliment an employee for a particular contribution, or just for doing a consistently good job each day. Don't assume that they are only doing what they were hired to do.
- Supervisors should see that library policies and procedures are revisited periodically. Make sure each employee knows what is expected of him/her, especially new employees. Unfortunately, the nature of such individual orientation plans is that current staff members provide information (usually much more than can be absorbed) that they think the new person will need, and the new person, who can't yet know what is actually needed, doesn't know how to sort out the truly useful from the not so useful (Caputo 1991).
- Let us also consider when planning and implementing procedures and policies for novice staff that newly hired student assistants are remembered. There is no doubt that individual attention and concern can create a successful employment experience on campus, thus discouraging the high rate of turnover affecting this critical employee group (McCabe 89).
- For 46% of survey respondents, prayer, or some alternative form of spirituality, can reduce stress levels. "Even the earliest recorded religious works suggest that a union with a higher power is not possible unless all distractions, all physical activity, all worldly things, and all thoughts are eliminated so that a higher level of consciousness can be obtained: This is the relaxation response in a spiritual form (Benson, 1975).

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- If an employee feels the boss has come up with a good idea, or is generally doing a good job, tell him/her. Yes, supervisors are human too; they also benefit from positive feedback.
- Whether management or staff, schedule time away from the job each year. If you cannot afford a week, or more, during the summer, then schedule a cluster of three or four-day weekends.

These are a few possibilities gleaned from research and observation, coupled with over a quarter century of on-the-job experience. 🐼

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Have you seen **Gold Rush Linker**, the **OpenURL** reference linking service made possible through the **Gold Rush** electronic journal management system. **OpenURL** resolvers are becoming available from many different sources such as integrated library system vendors (e.g., **ExLibris**, **Innovative Interfaces**, **Endeavor**) and through other services such as **Fretwell-Downing**. We have to learn more about all these new services. Who said our life was easy? See www.coalliance.org.

epixtech is now Dynix. Check out www.epixtech.com/.

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Making Good Libraries Better

by **Richard Abel** (Consultant; Phone: 503-292-0830; Fax: 503-292-0873)

Librarians of the last generation inherited good libraries, thanks to the generous postwar decades' budgets and the emergence of the re-printers who made good most of the holes in collections attributable to the **Great Depression** and **WW II**.

Further, libraries in mid-century enjoyed the financial muscle to move beyond the traditional role of supplying knowledge in books. Libraries were able to move behind the synthesized bodies of knowledge concepts and ethical precepts articulated in books. They could go back to providing some small portion of the raw information — the unprocessed data used by scholars to synthesize knowledge concepts and ethical precepts — that is contained in journals. Seldom have libraries stood so high historically as cultural institutions and icons as in the 25-year period from about 1950 to 1975.

But much changed beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. We need not dwell on most of the unhappy consequences of that aberrant period. Rather our focus must rest on the multifarious changes in academe which became visible by the mid-1970s.

For our purposes the most significant outcome of these manifold forces is the progressive decay of book collections and the consequent erosion of library utility to knowledge-seekers manifest in the form of increasing reliance upon the interlibrary loan system. These changes and their historic progression have been analyzed endlessly in all manner of forums for years. So, only a rapid recount of that history need be made here.

1. The 1970s saw the transition of academic governance from deserving academics close to the end of their service who prized libraries to professional management types.

2. The latter are necessarily highly respon-

sive to both marginal income opportunities and marginal cost factors.

3. By the mid-1950s, geometrical increases in support of academic scientific/technological research by government and business were well established.

4. Research faculty and academic management heartily responded to these marginal income opportunities.

5. As a consequence, academic managers came to see research facilities and professional staff as positive financial resources. By comparison, the long-nurtured professional objectives of librarians and their substantial facility came to be viewed as "financial black-holes," to use a favored metaphor.

6. Associated with these macro-changes in marginal and prestige assessments, professional academic prestige migrated from the synthesis and transfer of knowledge concepts and ethical precepts — education and knowledge — to the production.

7. Consequent on these changes in marginal professional financial and prestige quotients, geometrical increases in research results began to pour out of the academy and into the journal literature.

8. Related to these marginal professional increases in the value of producing research results, the system of academic advancement and perks became increasingly dependent upon contributing to this flow of information and data.

9. The obvious consequence of these monstrous year-to-year increases in information generation led to not only the ballooning of existing journals but to the ultimately out-of-control proliferation of new journals. (Incidentally, the open secret that the vast preponderance of this journal literature was of no or, at best, marginal

concern — estimates ranging as high as 75% has not slowed the avalanche of journal pages.)

10. This hothouse growth of journal literature led, in turn, to vast and progressive increases in library subscription costs.

11. These massive increases in journal costs occurred in tandem with progressive reductions in library budgets as academic managers diverted resources to marginally higher, immediate returns.

12. While all this was going on, another even more visible revolution was shakily advancing — the computer revolution.

13. Certainly one of the earliest glory points of the computer revolution was realized in libraries with the conversion of the enormous databases of library catalogs and circulation systems to electronic forms together with the parallel conversion of the books-in-print.

14. The early and marked success of these large databases at marginally small conversion and continuing operation costs led to a euphoric confidence that computers could be successfully employed in dealing with what gave the appearance of another large database, namely, the contents of the world's libraries.

15. This enthusiasm and confidence was shared not only by the electronic pied pipers in computing centers and many librarians but, most importantly, by a large fraction of academic managers.

16. Voila! Here was the silver bullet which would solve the intractable "Library Problem." Libraries could return to the idyllic precincts of

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