At Brunning: People & Technology--At the Only Edge that Means Anything/How we Understand What We Do

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f you are interested in leading a discussion, acting as a moderator, coordinating a lively lunch, or would like to make sure we discuss a particular topic, please let us know. The Charleston Conference prides itself on creativity, innovation, flexibility, and informality. If there is something you are interested in doing, please try it out on us. We’ll probably love it...

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Send ideas by July 15, 2016, to any of the Conference Directors listed above. The Call for Papers form is available at http://www.charlestonlibraryconference.com/participate/call-for-papers/.

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2016 Theme — “Roll With the Times or the Times Roll Over You”

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Right at the beginning, authors Dornfeld and O’Connor give us a blow-by-blow account of an operating room accident or battle — it all depends on what you know. A celebrated and senior GE surgeon is closing up a patient after a 7-hour emergency resection of a perforated colon. This is a life and death moment and it’s a day at the office most of us don’t experience. As the scrub technician does inventory, he counts fewer surgical sponges out than went in. He challenges the surgeon who proceeds with the stapling procedure — closing up. It’s everyone’s responsibility to heal the patient but it’s the scrub’s job to count instruments and everything that goes into or out of the patient. The scrub told the surgeon a sponge was missing.

The next thing anyone remembers is a sailing surgical stapler. An OR out of control.

The authors are consultants and ethnographers. And fairly courageous to step into the big trouble of a dysfunctional surgery unit at a major hospital. The situation, the environment, the players — are all high stakes, high risk, high stress, high talent and skills.
To their credit, the authors present blow by blow case studies of asking these questions in troubled companies. At first read, one might ask — this is too simple, too direct, too easy. But read those questions again, think of how your library isn’t changing or even inching ahead and these questions are telling and not easy. Just asking is an effort but a good effort.

Of the four, the last, the future is tough. It’s hard to imagine the future but that is where our hearts and minds point. More easily we can say who we are and we can point out the person who signs our paycheck. Much harder — to identify leadership, what that entails and how it relates to organizational behavior.

But the future…this is where our imagination takes us and where success, failure, well-being, happiness, and unhappiness will take place. We know we need to get better, grow, prosper but we understand it in “what if” statements. But we need to understand the future that is present in our culture.

I got this book to better understand CFAR’s role in helping Arizona State University Libraries into unison as we renovate an old building and along the way bring our large and talented staff into a new model of doing “library.” The Moment is an easy guide and handbook to achieve our goal. You probably face the same challenges one way or another and, whether you use CFAR or not, you can’t lose by learning cultural basics from some talented students of human behavior.

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become much more attentive to their users than to their book collections! And that those books would, as often as not, be seen as a problem as much as an asset.

Approval plans are all about buying books on the chance they might be used. They continue to make sense for libraries with the mission, and corresponding budget, to build research collections. Fewer and fewer libraries, however, can claim that mission, or count on that budget. Instead, the same profiles that fueled approval plans are now the engines beneath the hood for Demand-Driven Acquisition (DDA) programs, generating MARC files under subject and other parameters that can provide patron access to more books than approval plans ever did. Or, many of these same profiles have been retooled for approval plans where no books are bought until a librarian has first reviewed and authorized them online on their vendor’s interface, almost like a firm order. How many new books — and which ones, and under what conditions — will academic libraries buy without good evidence their patrons will discover and then open them? Those are the questions faced today by everyone in the business of academic books.

This issue of Against the Grain isn’t about approval plans. Approval plans, for the past thirty years or so, have simply been my own usual vantage point on the academic book business. In fact the five contributors to this issue, from their own vantage points — three librarians, a publisher, and a consultant — barely mention approval plans. Just a few years ago that wouldn’t have been the case. It’s a telling sign — as if we needed another — that the business of publishing, aggregating, selling, and buying academic books is going through a tectonic change, but at electronic speed.

Among the ways I’ve been fortunate in my career is that I began it by working for about fifteen years as a book vendor colleague of Rick Lugg. Now I’m fortunate once more that Rick published a recent piece of “what the next generation of vendor intermediary might look like,” companies who bring analytics to bear on the books and other resources that publishers produce and that libraries buy.

But today’s libraries don’t simply “buy resources.” Librarians realize that another factor that can’t be ignored in the market is the purchasing power they have. When academic librarians speak up, publishers, vendors, and aggregators are wise to listen. Stephanie Church, of Case Western Reserve University, is a librarian with a lot to say. What she says is that assessment is “no longer a buzzword” for academic libraries. A library’s importance to a university is no longer assumed. Libraries must prove it, and usage data is one of the ways to “strengthen the story.” Stephanie also has things to say about print and eBook preferences; DDA, eBook pricing models, DRM policies, and user authentication hurdles; and other questions too. Readers will be thankful he says a lot more than that, as well, and all of us with our hand in that book culture as it exists today would best pay attention.

All of us in the business of academic book-selling might prefer that things were different — the book unthreatened, library collections revered and not questioned, usage one of those “nice to haves,” budgets strong, approval plans soaring, eBook models settled, assessment and analytics merely words in the dictionary. Instead, whether publisher, vendor, aggregator, or librarian, we’re all challenged to examine the assumptions and practices that have sustained us in the past. If we are going to engage with our future, one place we are not going to find that, I can tell you, is in the encyclopedia.

### Endnotes

### @Brinning: People & Technology

I know. This is easy to say, flaunts legal and moral authority, and is post-modern beyond any reasonable test. We are beyond scruples here. But stuff is happening at the edges of what we do. The first edge strategy is realizing this. 🌐

### Column Editor’s Note: Concepts lifted from an excellent Harvard Business Review monograph, Alan Lewis and Dan McKone’s Edge Strategy: A New Mindset for Profitable Growth (HBR Press, 2016).

### Rumors

Run into Daryl Rayner in Fiesole! I hadn’t seen her in ages. Remember her Rumours from Paddington column in Against the Grain many years ago? That was when she was at Xrefer (now Credo). Daryl is now with Exact Editions. [https://www.exacteditions.com/](https://www.exacteditions.com/)

Following Italy, a wonderful woman got married at Boone Hall Plantation in Charleston this past weekend so my-son-in-law and daughter were visiting. We had the awesome job of babysitting my grandson 17-month-old George Jackson! What a cutie! George’s dad (a cardio-thoracic surgeon) has taught him to love books! Who would continued on page 46

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