Predictions for the future world of work: challenges for information professionals

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Abstract
There are challenges for the new information professional. In recent years technological development and changes in the quantity of and access to information has influenced the nature of information work. Predictions for the future include the 'cybrarian'. Yet various studies demonstrate the continuing need for a physical place which plays a vital role in the informal gathering of community members. While traditional library support functions may continue, there are many changes to the nature of place, particularly to become also a welcoming environment with access to food drink, group areas, computers and events and a place that is almost always open.   The development of the physical library according to changing needs brings another skills challenge for the information professional. A current trend for the profession is the growth of consortia partnerships between various libraries for best provision of resources. Other partnerships and collaborative initiatives are now also evident, such as joint use libraries, and partnerships between libraries and other agencies for the provision of services, such as life long learning. Thus information professionals will need to continue to develop alliance building and political skills to be successful. Leadership will become more important to the profession. The leader of the future will be more than a good manager or someone who has attended the right courses. A leader must have experience, vision, integrity and an understanding of the potential of the organisation and the people within it, desiring to take his/her place as part of the profession.

1. Introduction

There are challenges for the new information professional. In recent years technological development and changes in the quantity of and access to information has influenced the nature of information work. Will this pace of change continue into the future and how would this affect the role of the information professional?

2. The cybrarian?

In 2002, Surprenant & Perry (2002) wrote about the 'academic cybrarian' in 2012, who would work both in INFOspace (the virtual world) and an INFOplace (or library as it could still be called), which in 2012 would be organised around information clusters, with each cluster contained within "a transparent shimmering wall of digits which identifies the cluster by faculty/cybrarian members, course title and code". Students create, organise and manage their personal info-cyberspace, including their real-time digital info-profiles, helped by cybrarians, who operate in a virtual reality mode using a 'Seeking Helmet'. Furthermore, the role of these cybrarians in 2012 would become absolutely central in the digital education environment.

In 2008, cybrarians using 'seeking helmets' are difficult to find, but the fast changing pace of technology is greatly changing the arena of information work.

3. The future

The Chartered Management Institute has, this year (2008), published 2 research reports regarding the future of work in 10 years time. *Management futures – the world in 2018* (www.managers.org.uk) presents results based on interviews with business leaders, futureologists and academics, and predicts what the world of work will look like in 10 years time and what should start to be done in order to prepare. The report says that 'in 2018 more organisations will be virtual'. It says that 'knowledge and wisdom management' will be key to organisational success, and organisations will have gather and build knowledge about external developments such as environmental issues, social changes and competitive intelligence by using specialised systems and services. The report says "immediate access to many data sources means that managers will need to ensure that they have the skills to analyse complex data from multiple sources and use their judgement to make decisions". The report says that managing information overload and learning when to disengage from technology will be a future challenge.

The predictions for the future in this *Management futures* report imply that there will be plenty of opportunities for information professionals to use their skills and to train others to acquire them, particularly in relation to filtering information.

4. The digital age

Godwin (2008, p.3) says

> "Our users have new mindsets and new expectations. Our information role has spread from buildings and collections to encompass the whole electronic world. ... We have to recognise the importance of this new landscape ...".

Godwin (2008) points out that many information professionals see Web 2.0 technologies as critical to the future development of library services, which has led to the use of the term Library 2.0 to characterise the changing kind of service. He defines the characteristics that make something '2.0' as involving online tools and applications with which individuals can interact, create and share information using the web as a platform. Thus library 2.0 involves making a library more collaborative, interactive, based on user needs, relating to both physical and virtual space. Thus the massive development of Web 2.0 tools indicates that the information environment can now be viewed very differently than it did as recently as two years ago. Many libraries are now using online applications and tools, which allow individuals to interact, create and share information using the Web as a platform. These tools offer a bridge to the 'google generation' as well as providing new ways to reach users and tools with which to teach them (Godwin, 2008, p.8).

Brabazon (2008), pointing out that 'everything is online', comments that social relationships are now managed through social networking sites, commerce is now e-commerce, teachers are facilitators and librarians have become information managers and resource centre administrators However, the joint JISC and British Library study (www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/resourcediscovery/googlegen.aspx) about the information behaviour of the researcher of the future, the *Google Generation Report* found that "the information literacy of young people has not improved with the widening access to technology: in fact their apparent facility with computers disguises some worrying problems." Brabazon (2008) also highlights a flattening of expertise, knowledge, writing, reading and scholarship, which she terms the 'Google effect' related to "The Google

algorithm, where sites are ranked on popularity rather than importance".

The constant change of the Web 2.0 world suggests a constant learning curve. The pace of change is recognised by Godwin & Parker (2008), who will continually update their book with their blog (http://infolitlib20.blogspot.com).

5. Generational change and library development

Sayers (2007) takes the additional aspect of generational change to be considered when considering challenges for information professionals. He examined selected findings from the 2006 CAVAL (a library consortium based in Australia) Training Needs Survey across Australia, New Zealand and Asia to assess their implications for academic libraries in the context of generational change. He points out that, given the rate of technological change to which academic libraries are exposed (including social networking and Web 2.0) and demographic changes, academic libraries could be at risk of marginalisation if generational change is not managed. He argues that the primary challenge for 'all' libraries in Australia is to ensure that there will be a new generation of library professionals entering and remaining in the workplace over the next decade. The survey asked respondents about their hopes and fears for the library profession in the decade ahead. A number of challenges were identified, but the top four were (in this order)

- New and emerging technologies impacting libraries, focusing on Web 2.0 and Library 2.0 applications such as blogs, wikis and podcasts
- Managing budgets and seeking new funding sources for libraries
- Marketing and promoting libraries and information services
- Workforce and succession planning.

6. Library buildings

Despite digital developments and remote access to information resources, the concept of library as place is not obsolete - even though it is no longer the only place to obtain information. Various studies (eg Waxman et al, 2007; Gust & Haka, 2006) demonstrate the continuing need for a physical place which plays a vital role in the informal gathering of community members. In the university environment, while traditional library support functions, such as study spaces, search and support services etc, may continue, there are many changes to the nature of place - a place that is also a welcoming environment with access to food and drink, group areas, computers and events - and a place that is almost always open. The development of the physical library according to changing needs brings another skills challenge for the information professional.

Gust & Haka (2006) discuss the phenomenon experienced by many other academic libraries, which is an ever increasing reliance on electronic resources by users, resulting in decreasing numbers of users visiting the library itself. Whilst it is clear that the ability to access information from a variety of remote locations is a huge advantage, there has been concern that remote access does not provide the opportunity for knowledgeable assistance with electronic searching. Yet in this changing information environment, the physical library has to change also to meet the changed needs of its new generation of users.

Library building makeovers are transforming the physical library environment, presenting a warm, welcoming environment with a more comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. Trends include the incorporation of cafes, comfortable seating, group areas for networking physically, and careful choices of colour schemes and flooring. Academic libraries have responded to user demand for 24/7 opening hours. This could be seen as a contradiction to the demand for remote access to electronic resources, yet it relates to the growing 24/7 lifestyle and the conception of the library as a social place where users can get together rather than study on their own. High speed public access computers, ports for high speed laptop connections and wireless access throughout buildings meet online access requirements in a social setting.

Waxman et al (2007) discuss the concept of the academic library as a 'third place'. This concept was introduced by Oldenburg (1989, p.2) as a "setting beyond home and work (the first and second places respectively) in which people relax in good company and do so on a regular basis", which serves a place to bring community together, a place to welcome newcomers, a place to find individuals similar to oneself, a place for community diversity, a place for fun and entertainment and a place for intellectual discussions. The research conducted by Waxman et al (2007) indicates that the third places selected by today's students meet some of the characteristics of Oldenburg's third places. Furthermore, another characteristic was added – the need to find a 'restorative' place. Refurbishment of library buildings to provide a comfortable environment, including coffee shop facilities in particular, can provide an atmosphere conducive to the ways in which students now study, research and communicate.

This change can also be seen in public libraries. "The common theme in most public library renovations today is the library facility being transformed into the ultimate community centre" (Gust & Haka, 2006, p.142). In some ways this mirrors the 'cozy atmosphere' created by some major bookstores, with coffee shops, comfortable seating and free internet access.

Thus these studies demonstrate the continuing need for a physical place which plays a vital role in the informal gathering of community members. In the university environment, while traditional library support functions, such as study spaces, search and support services etc, may continue, there are many changes to the nature of place - a place that is also a welcoming environment with access to food drink, group areas, computers and events and a place that is almost always open. The development of the physical library according to changing needs brings another skills challenge for the information professional.

7. Skills

The report Management futures – the world in 2018 (www.managers.org.uk) says much about the drive of technology and its implications, particularly with regard to flexible working – "people will come together in teams for specific projects, complete them, disband and then reform as new projects arise". Perhaps this indicates the end of rigid job roles and ways of working. Information professionals could be aligned to different departments, using their skills as required – anytime, any place and anywhere. The report also says that "partnerships and collaborative working are important constituents of the successful organisation of the future." This perhaps enhances a current trend for the profession, which is manifest in the growth of consortia partnerships between various libraries for best provision of resources and also for strength in lobbying. Other partnerships and collaborative initiatives are now also evident between libraries and other agencies for the provision of services, such as life long learning. The study by Ashcroft et al (2005) found that the sample library services investigated all work with other organisations to provide adult learning services, and a wide range of partners has been established. These include learning providers (e.g. learndirect), local education providers (eg colleges), and voluntary organisations (eg Age Concern). The advantages of these partnerships go beyond provision and encompass sharing costs, facilities and marketing. Another example of library partnerships and collaborative working is The Bridge in Glasgow, which is a model of

fully integrated service for both a college and public library. The partnership has resulted in an improved service for all users. Use of the public library has risen since merging with the college, and there is an overall increase in learning activity in the area. It demonstrates that when they are focused on the needs of the user, shared services can be transformational (Kearney, 2008).

The LIMES (Library and Information Management Employability Skills) Project (www.ics.headacademy.ac.uk/limes/CONTENT/index.htm) in 2006 identified that there were gaps in the skills valued by employers and some were not apparent in recent graduates. Skills that were identified as emerging trends, asked for by employers, included application of IT within an organisation, awareness of legislation and web development. Technology is one of the issues and the skills identified in the other report from the Chartered Management Institute in 2008 *Environmental scanning: trends affecting the world of work in2018: executive summary* (www.managers.org.uk). This report uses a PEST analysis to help identify the most important trends that could shape the future workforce. This report predicts that the demand for flexible working, technological enablers and changing work activities will drive flatter structure organisations and fewer levels of management. It says that "the increasing pace of technological developments drives the need for continual training", and "the balance has swung in favour of the proactive individual who manages his or her career".

Walton (2008) discusses a recent survey in the USA, which ranked creativity in the top five of the skills deemed by corporate leaders to be the most critical that employees need to demonstrate. Operational excellence does not always mix well with creativity and innovation, but creativity is needed when there is a constantly changing external environment. For creativity and innovation, staff teams containing people who have diverse skills and experience can bring together ideas from many sources and explore unknown areas in order to develop new procedures. "By engaging library users as creative partners, the services being developed are more likely to be fit for purpose and tailored to meet users' needs." (Walton, 2008, p.128)

8. The entrepeneur

Much is written and discussed about the changing nature of libraries in the digital age, but little is written about entrepreneurs in libraries. Organisations which accommodate and welcome entrepreneurs have

entrepreneurial cultures in that they value and promote creativity, ideas and innovation. They are skilled in taking the right steps in response to a changing environment and responding well to their customers' expectations and the market in which they find themselves. Business Link has 'The Entrepreneurial Quality Check' (www.businesslink.gov.uk):

- Self- confidence – a self belief and passion about your product or service – your enthusiasm should win people over to your ideas
- Self-determination - a belief that the outcome of events is down to your own actions, rather than based on external factors or other people's actions
- Being a self-starter - the ability to take the initiative, work independently and to develop your ideas.
- Judgement – the ability to be open-minded when listening to other people's advice, while bearing in mind your objectives for business
- Commitment – the willingness to make personal sacrifices through long hours and loss of leisure time
- Perseverance – the ability to continue despite setbacks, financial insecurity and exposure to risk
- Initiative – the ability to be resourceful and proactive, rather than adopting a passive 'wait and see' approach.

These entrepreneurial qualities can apply to libraries as well as business. Lambert & Rowley (2008, p.36) identify that, in the UK, public service is changing rapidly with heavy focus on citizen and community, underpinned by a network in public services. They say

> "Information professionals need to play an active role in such developments, to grasp the opportunity to to embrace innovation and entrepreneurial action, and develop, deliver and promote their role as public sector entrepreneurs."

9. Leadership

Research by Mullins (2005) in the public library sector indicates an apparent lack of understanding of the distinction between management and leadership. Mullins (2005) also notes the scarcity of leadership qualities with senior managers focusing too much on library skills and not enough on leadership. Furthermore, a survey of new & graduating students in 2 large LIS schools in the US found that few chose to study leadership or management type courses, although many thought they would be taking up a leadership role on leaving college.

Gwyer et al (2008, p.28) say that "Leadership is a hot topic in the UK library world, with organisations considering ways to develop leaders to replace the many who expect to retire in the next 10-15 years", and they report on an international conference held in 2007 - *IFLA 7th World Conference on Continuing Professional Development & Workplace Learning for Library and Information Professions.* The conference covered many angles of leadership. For UK public libraries, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council offered a country-wide MLA leadership development programme, which trained more than 660 key library staff from England, as there is concern in the UK regarding the need to develop leaders from within the library. A more local focus came from Edge Hill University, UK on recognition that a large number of staff in the service needed support and development but that the limitation of funding prohibited attendance at external events. They developed a year long programme to provide the needed training and development, which started with a skills analysis exercise and culminated with a personal development plan. This programme was supplemented with visits to other libraries and talks from service heads outside the organisation to provide the external context. Mentorship was a strong element of this programme.

In USA, the Mortenson Centre at the University of Illinois is developing and testing modules for international leadership (funded by US Institute of Museum & Library Services). Positive learning emerged when librarians from different countries interacted and shared experienced and perceptions as they undertook the leadership modules. Attention has been drawn to the need for diverse leaders. The Spectrum Scholarship in the USA has developed leadership skills in 500 librarians to address the fact that there are relatively few non-white people in librarianship and less visible in management positions. (Gwyer et al, 2008)

Rowley & Roberts (2008) discuss a number of initiatives associated with leadership development in the information profession, including leadership programmes such as British Library's Future Leaders Programme in the UK. Roberts & Rowley (2008) point out that the development of leadership throughout an organisation does not just happen because individuals aspire to be leaders or find them selves acting as leaders. Leadership capacity needs to be cultivated by super leaders who

focus on developing leadership in others, stimulating & empowering them. Leaders always take a broad perspective looking to the longer term future. They scan the horizon, and network and influence outside the organisation so they are able to make intelligent and well-formed decisions about strategic direction. They encourage others to do the same. (Rowley & Roberts, 2008)

However, as well as personal career development, the role of the individual in the future of the profession is also important. McMenemy (2008, p.267) stresses this point

> "In our profession's leaders, we must seek more than a good manager or someone who has attended the right courses; we must seek experience, vision, integrity and an understanding of the potential of the organisation and the people within it. Just as importantly, we need leaders who wish to take their place as part of the profession, not see their roles merely as caretakers of a service."

10. Conclusions

Technological development and changes in the quantity of and access to information has influenced the nature of information work, bringing challenges for the new information professional. Whilst in 2012 we may not see cybrarians, who operate in a virtual reality mode using a 'Seeking Helmet', information professionals will need to continue to develop alliance building and political skills to be successful. Furthermore, and importantly, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council report *Towards a Strategy for Workforce Development* found that leadership was the most frequently cited and urgent development need identified in the research and interviews (MLA. 2003, p.19).

However, various initiatives and strategies are in place to address challenges.

Parry (2008) points out that librarians are already responding to the need for designing a new kind of learning space. Parry (2008, p.50) focuses not only on an exciting future vision, but considers other measured views, finally drawing on the analogy of the Chinese phoenix, which represents "our capacity for vision, for collecting sensory information about our environment and events unfolding within it". As Parry says (2008, p.45) "of course, successful librarians will continue to be flexible, adaptable and multi-skilled in order to survive in an environment of constant and rapid change."

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