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The reinvention of the Library of the National Congress of Chile: from management of products and services to management of relations with congresspersons[1]

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Abstract

This paper presents considerations on modalities of library presence and action in the current context of global transformations, and on the new "conversational spaces" being opened within that process. The authors argue that this new way of being in the world can find expression in new ways of conceiving library roles and those of our clients. From this new perspective, things themselves are reinvented, acquiring new uses. We believe that the library that enters, today, into these conversations, no longer offers products and services but rather opportunities for those who engage in dialogue with it.

FIRST PART

1.- Preliminary Remarks
The innovative force of technology and globalization has triggered profound changes in our ways of being in the world. It is now necessary to mobilize our institutions to participate in the new global "conversation" (the praxis of being together), challenging us to reinvent ourselves for this

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previously unknown dynamic of relationships. This new way of *being in the world* has to do with how we assume our role in that dynamic and how others assume their roles in interaction with us. In this new context, things themselves are reinvented, acquiring new uses.

Through this presentation, we wish to invite you to share in a reflection which we initiate by first asking ourselves questions about the presence and action of libraries throughout the world; the answers to these questions will determine the scope of available possibilities.

Today, libraries that enter into these new conversational spaces no longer offer products and services but rather *opportunities* to their clients. A library that understands itself as a product and service provider limits its field of client transactions to that of needs and requirements. However, there is an alternative way to conceive a library: as an institution that collaborates in broadening client *possibilities*. This means *tuning in on clients*, the role of the library being to make accessible and comprehensible knowledge available, in accord with client cultural practices and values, enabling clients likewise to learn social skills for the timely management of that knowledge. This, in turn, will enable clients to make new commitments, as they transform their library into an instrument for the creation and accumulation of social capital.

Technological revolutions, which transform the course of history time and again, are appropriate spaces for the development of practice dynamics. Aligning ourselves with current historical dynamics challenges us, therefore, to be creative and alert to those anomalies that open new perspectives on our profession. They also make it possible to detect marginal practices that open onto significant change. That type of practice authorizes the development of productive skills that will create new processes valuable to our clients; and, both for them and our libraries themselves, new facets of identity.

It is thus necessary for us to influence and contribute to the future of what is at the heart of our profession, contributing, out of our own spaces, to the design of "the world of our clients".

2.- Libraries Over Time.

Libraries over time have much to teach us. It is thought that, at some moment in the remote past, as societies became more sedentary, populations grew and urban life became more complex, it was necessary to face the inevitable weakness of human memory. The registration of the information necessary to govern those societies, especially administrative and economic information, had to be guaranteed. Toward the end of the fourth millennium BCE, those data were inscribed on clay tablets on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Given their documentary value, those tablets were the archive material for the first libraries, making them, in contemporary terms, *repositories of official commitments* for the governance of ancient societies.

From their beginnings, this information storage in libraries increased society's capacity to remember and communicate information and knowledge. This practice has been the essence of libraries ever since. A symbol of this is the famous Library of the Museum of Alexandria, the city of the Lighthouse. That library was not only a monument to the systematic organization of erudition but was also foundationally a space for disclosure, an observatory for exploration and openness on to worlds which, just like the Lighthouse of the city that was its home, illuminated and made visible what was possible and, thanks to that library, *what it was necessary to see*. That

library, as those, which were yet to come, created complex worlds that fostered multiple knowings and skills. During the Middle Ages, although their use was limited to monastery grounds until the invention of the printing press, librarians, scribes, authors, lexicographers, historians and poets lived together in libraries. The library was an enormous space for social interaction. Its ethos, over time, was nearly always an ethos of context, of communities. The appearance of the printing press, as it removed the art of editing from the library enclosure, led to the temporary loss of that grand skill. Later, with the Seventeenth Century, Cartesian dogma imposed a paradigm in the Western world that brought with it the modern practice of rationalist discipline in the way the world is to be understood and the library, in line with this scientist perspective, comes to interpret information as an object, which it is to store, administer and catalogue as an intermediary.

3.- Problems and Dangers for Contemporary Libraries.

We frequently hear, these days, a number of phrases often repeated among librarians: "people aren't using libraries"; we don't really know what they want"; "I go around looking for users"; "libraries are no longer needed; Internet has it all"; "we are not appreciated as much as we should be"; "they don't give me the budget resources I need"; "libraries don't have good collections"; and so on.

These common complaints show that we are witnesses to a paradigm change. Globalization and technological change have changed our ways of working, of relating to each other and communicating; they have even changed what, for us, is common sense: we have moved from a rigid, Cartesian objectivized world into an experience of human networks in which we interpret reality in social interaction. The practices deriving from contemporary contingencies undoubtedly create enormous opportunities to be grasped and dangers to be faced. The intermediary power of libraries can be weakened by the free flow of information of unknown validity, through virtual and digital libraries and the Internet. Clients, moreover, are exposed to many experiences, which change permanently their standards for service, which, in turn, become new requirements that are transferred, by individuals, to libraries.

The sheer volume of information on the Net and the issue of its temporal validity raise concerns for the difficulty inherent to the conservation of data, posing a renewed threat to human memory.

However, the greater danger is that we see ourselves as organizations dedicated to satisfying information needs. That way of being and acting for a library presupposes that we are providers, organizers and creators of information products, such that our interlocutor seems to us to be an information user, and we perceive our tools to be means to make transactions more efficient.

A library understood this way is organized in terms of four strategic processes: identification of needs; collection management; collection organization; and collection access, delivery and use evaluation mechanisms. A library organized this way places materials, things, in the center of its mission, and turns its back on client relations and concerns. When we look on clients as users, we limit our capacity to create client value.

An important question we can, therefore, raise is: does this necessarily entail a loss of power for libraries? Are our budgets limited because our libraries are incapable of creating client value?

4.- Libraries in Today's World: Our Approach to the Reinvention of the Library of the National Congress.

For the reinvention of our library, we have made the crucial commitment to change, from the management of products to the management of relationships. We believe that, by defining Congresspersons as the focus of our efforts, the Library of the National Congress of Chile will gain strength as a powerful and relevant entity in the eyes of our target client group. This implies that we must displace value away from the object –information- and toward client relationships, so that objects take second place to relationships.

Within this experience of internal change and transformation, and as the common sense of traditional operational attitudes is reconfigured, we are proposing a return to the concept of *library as an instrument for the support (assistance) and conservation (care) of community commitments and as a lighthouse for disclosure*, in order to broaden the possibilities for new discourse to Congresspersons, as in the ancient Library-Lighthouse of Alexandria.

5.- Recovering Essential Values.

The idea of establishing significant relationships with the client community is not a new value for libraries. Today, it is important to recover traditional values and certain ancient practices that are part of the original vocation of libraries: to participate in the day-to-day concerns and activities of the community; to generate spaces for learning to "interpret the world"; to create spaces for social interaction for the creation of knowledge and *disclosure*.

The first value to recover is the library's role in the community, so that the library becomes an integral element in the life of the community. Still today, we see this essential role clearly fulfilled by Public Libraries and we seek to extend that value to our Congressional community. The practice of being among Congresspersons means much, much more than the vicarious management of the knowledge they require: it is, above all, supporting them in the development of their capacity to act in communities relevant to them. This approach has forced us to pay attention to the universe of our Congresspersons' commitments and identities[4] and to leave our offices to participate actively in the day-to-day routine of Congress. In practice, this has meant, for example, facing the challenge to develop a library presence in Congressional Districts, so that Congresspersons will have their Library available to them for their District work.

We also wish to highlight the traditional teaching role of libraries, the role of teaching and enabling understanding of alphabets, now to be extended to include all information technologies. Disruptive technological innovations (clay tablets, papyrus scrolls, printing) have entailed significant leaps in human understanding of our surroundings, meaning today that we must make the commitment to info-alphabetize our client communities to help people understand what happens to them as they enter the new world of digital literacy.

A third value to be recovered is the original experience of libraries as spaces of interaction for the creation of knowledge, in which authors, thinkers, readers, editors and reproducers all meet. Face-to-face dialogue with Congresspersons and their staff, as they fulfill their daily

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[4] Identity, understood here as the way a person is perceived in a given community.

commitments, helps the Library recover the ethos of context, which characterized the first true libraries, enriching the knowledge environment of the Congress, as a whole. Digital means of communication enhance the recovery of this essential value."

Finally, we assign special significance to the practice of *disclosure*, that special disposition of mind that notices gaps through which what is difficult to see can be perceived, that discloses new spaces and recovers old viewpoints. Disclosure and recovery give meaning to the reinvention of our own identity. Disclosure also opens to us the many-faceted richness of diversity that identifies us as community. This means, for example, referencing interpretative displacements of power, such as that achieved by Representative Pedro Montt, in 1833, when he founded the Library of the National Congress of Chile, by bringing, from France, the first highly-prized collections which were to open new political and social space in our country.

This recovery of meaning challenges, not only us, as Library, but also Congresspersons, who are called to incorporate us entry into their day-to-day practices and enter into a process of mutual hearing and collaboration. We seek to recover the sense that librarians are collaborators, committed to the future and present reality of Congresspersons, and not only sophisticated providers of information.

SECOND PART

A STRATEGIC SHIFT: From the management of products and services to the management of relationships (Methodological issues).

The First Part of this paper presents the conceptual framework for the Strategic Change we are implementing in the Library of the National Congress of Chile (http://www.bcn.cl). That framework proposes a "new way of being and acting for libraries", that is interpretative in nature, within the context of current sweeping historical change.

In line with this approach, we believe that the time is right to make a necessary *management shift* in the day-to-day activities of the Library. This implies a transformation of the common sense that imbues the internal environment of the Library and calls, therefore, for a *change of governance style*, oriented toward a universe of multiple interrelations and networks, rather than toward a world of products.

This means that, within the Library, there must be a general shift away from conventional management and toward customer relations service geared to Congresspersons themselves, as persons and not as consumers.

In the Second Part of the paper, we present the process implemented for elaborating a new management Plan, in methodological, and not theoretical, terms, which explains the change in tone of this paper. For that Plan, it was necessary to translate the interpretative approach into a Vision-Mission, so as to install the new approach formally in the Library and also orient decisions regarding the most appropriate actions to be taken to make that vision a reality.

This process led to the definition of spaces, or dimensions, in which institutional action would take place. This, in turn, made it possible to specify precise roles within the Library and, through the use of certain diagnostic tools, to define roles for optimum responses to the concerns and identity of Congresspersons.

The *Vision-Mission*, as newly defined, for this purpose, is linked to those roles in the following ways:

In its *dimension as custodian of national heritage*, the Library of the National Congress assumes a role of historical transcendence, conserving the memory of the juridical and historic commitments of Chilean society; preserving the *future presence* of Congresspersons and the fruit of their activities, making them available to future citizens in Library archives.

In its *congressional dimension*, the Library's role is geared toward a *day-to-day relationship* with Congresspersons, synchronized with them in actions that respond to their diverse requirements, out of which new services are offered. The impact and validity of the responses generated in this give-and-take are then evaluated.

In its *public dimension*, the Library collaborates in the creation of connections between Congresspersons and the broader society, by creating information products and services that favor a fuller understanding of the laws passed by Congress and of the legislative process, in general, and by creating spaces for Congressperson-citizen interaction.

Our commitment to focus management on the congressional community led us to take the next step: to discover Congresspersons (in the sense indicated above), particularly by observing the special type of community they form by gathering together as Congress. In other words, we ask: what are the basic concerns Congresspersons have that arise from their everyday activities? To this end, we asked a series of questions:

- What are the concerns, practices, traditions and values of the congressional community?
- What restrictions and opportunities arise from the current operational style of our organization with regard to the management of relationships with the congressional community?
- How can we design and implement lines of action to bring about the desired change in management style?

METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS.

A process was designed in function of the three central questions posed:

1.- What are the concerns, practices, traditions and values of the congressional community?

An ad hoc Innovation Team was formed to answer this question, involving Library researchers from different Departments and disciplines. The Team process was as follows:

Identification of "Orienting Values".[5]

The values that orient each Congressperson, in particular, were identified, together with the relevant "conflict of values", so as to later determine the development of pertinent lines of services.

The **definition of procedures** to that end consisted in forming an interdisciplinary team of Library researchers with a community –Congresspersons- (the latter, a sample representative of the seats held by the different political parties).

The **instruments** for that procedure were informal, direct conversations; analysis of Congressperson requirements; listening to needs and concerns expressed to the support network already in place for Congresspersons (Legislative Committee Secretaries, personal secretaries and advisors of Congresspersons); analysis of Congressperson declarations that appeared in the mass media; analysis of their participation in congressional sessions and individual legislative and political proposals.

In this context, the fundamental instrument employed was in-depth interviews, video taped and transcribed for subsequent analysis, complemented by field visits with Congresspersons in their District activities (Visits began in June, 2004).

On the basis of the in-depth interviews, an exercise in **value segmentation[6]** was performed that identified four groups of Congresspersons: a Social Assistance Reference group; a group of Legislators; Policy Theme promoters; and Media Communicators. On applying this segmentation to all members of the House of Representatives, the research team found that 80% of this Congress's members belong to the first two groups.

The **analysis of the interviews** concluded that:

- The Social Assistance Reference group gives priority to active participation in local activities in their Districts and perceives the legislative role as difficult to reconcile with their presence "on the ground". A phrase to characterize this group is: "We should spend more time with the people".

- The group of Legislators assigns priority to their role in the elaboration of laws, especially in Legislative Committees. Activities in their Districts seem, to them, obligatory duties that may serve as input for the legislative process or as dues to be paid for continuing in their legislative activity. They identify with the phrase: "A good legislator was lost because he did not maintain his voting base".

The research team finally defined the relevant **conflict of values** to be: "We must legislate, without losing votes". This, then, was the basis that was to guide the work of designing a renewed range of services in the Library.

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[5] See: Taking an expanded view of costumers' needs". M. F. Letelier, C. Espinoza and B. J. Calder. Marketing Research, Winter, 2000, Vol. 12, N° 4. pp. 4-11.
[6] Ibid. 2: in the sense that values are understood as the way in which persons live their roles.

2.- What restrictions and opportunities arise from the current operational style of our organization with regard to the management of relationships with the congressional community?

A diagnosis was performed to evaluate the current operational style of the Library, from the perspective of the new managerial approach of the new Director.[7]

Six components were identified to structure the diagnosis: values of the Library's institutional cultural values; organizational structure and rules; technological platform; habits and procedures; customer relations; internal relations.

According to this diagnostic structure, the findings were:

1.- *Institutional cultural values*: It was found that the Library's vocation was more akin to that of a Public Library than of a Congressional Library. This was noted in the assignment of resources; the particular competencies of personnel; the organizational structure of the Library; and the type of services provided.

Values associated with the general culture of civil service were also discovered, according to which seniority, and not merit, is the basis of careers. Moreover, action was found to be geared to production and not to relationships with users, where only technological innovation is appreciated.

2.- *Organizational structure and rules*: Structures are rigid and hierarchical. Internal rules do not permit flexible, rapid and responsible response to Congresspersons' requirements. Broad consensus will be necessary to bring about change. This is the most critical issue on the agenda.

On the other hand, roles in strategic areas are lacking in the current structure (development of customer relations management, congressional advisory services, content, human resources development and info-alphabetization). The system of personnel evaluation does not allow for promotions on the basis of ability development, insofar as current regulations inhibit dynamic management and function mobility.

3.- *Technological platform*: Significant restrictions in the Library's technological platform were found, for instance in the institution's different Data Bases, developed separately on the basis of systems difficult to open to Internet. This constitutes an obstacle to developing flexible and rapid responses to Congressperson requirements.

4.- *Habits and procedures: Management and Leadership*. Department chiefs were found to be deficient in the areas of basic management skills and leadership in areas such as budget management, library collection management, cost analysis and project implementation.

An elemental digital culture was found to exist, affected by fragmentary processes of task coordination (duplications).

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[7] This diagnosis was performed by Ferreiro and Muga en June, 2003.

There are no customarily used mechanisms for hearing user and *non-user* complaints and concerns.

5.- *Customer relations*: Shared understandings of the value of orienting Library services toward Congresspersons were found to be lacking (for example, for some, the term "client" means "user"; for others, it means "clientelism", with a pejorative connotation; finally, there are those for whom "client" is "someone to serve and take care of" and who are therefore predisposed to contact with Congresspersons.

Generally, the emotional disposition to hear others and construct together an identity relevant to Congresspersons has been found to be lacking. Current institutional culture is unprepared for openness to this change, given installed practices of objectivizing relationships.

The *Identity of the Library of the National Congress of Chile*, in the eyes of Congresspersons, is that of a distant, inflexible Library, whose services are little known. They do not perceive the Library as an operational nexus centered on its relationship with them.

6.- *Internal relations*: A specific area for the development of personnel does not exist, nor is relevant know-how available.

In summary, the diagnosis revealed a predominant management style that is "**hierarchical, bureaucratic and framed in terms of watertight compartments**". Thus, a change in management style was perceived to be both relevant and urgent, being a factor that must influence the way each of the six components evaluated will eventually be addressed.

3.- How can we design and implement lines of action to being about the desired change in management style?

In terms of the six components around which the evaluation was organized and adding two historical value dimensions found in the Library, the strategy for change was developed as follows:

With regard to *cultural values*, the focus is to place clients in the center of Library routines and to generate competencies for responding to client commitments and team work by creating an area of Relationship Development to develop processes to research and propose new services that should be implemented in the Library.

 Moreover, in order to recover from library tradition the capacity to summon library users to generate new knowledge and to respond to technological innovation, the following actions have been taken: a Content Development Unit was created to be responsible for the generation and distribution of public-use content (WEB) and restricted-use content for Congresspersons (Congressional Intranet services), including the development of publishing services related to the legislative process. This concern also involves the creation of a Program of Computer Skills Development geared to help our focus community synchronize with the new skills required for successful participation in the emerging information society.

With regard to *organizational structure and rules*, flexibility must be increased by means of a redefinition of employee rosters so that they will be less rigid, providing greater mobility and promotions on the basis of merit.

With regard to the *technological platform*, it will be necessary to develop technology for Digital Services, in order to generate autonomous-use, customizable tools, with intuitive interfaces, for intermediate and end users. Service managers will also need management and client relations control systems.

In the area of *habits and processes*, an on-going process, involving many Library staff, is already underway to redefine services in terms of "client experience" and create operational commitment processes that guarantee customary focus on that experience. Staff who have participated in this service redefinition have done so, initially, voluntarily and as "extra work". Given that the system does not reward that type of activity, the decision was taken to institutionalize the experience.

With regard to customer relations, in order to ensure direct communication with Congresspersons, personal Information Coordinators were assigned and easy-to-use, permanently-available contact tools, such as Intranet, were created. Broadly participative direct Library staff contact with Congresspersons will mobilize new skills and generate new spaces for collaboration with them in the development of their networks. A good example, in this sense, are the Citizen Consensus Conferences[8] –one has already been held-; a public-use WEB site for knowledge transfer; a training center for computer skills; and round Table discussions.

In the area of internal relations, a Personnel Development unit is needed to care for professional growth and personal welfare of staff, within the context of the new skills required for the management of relationships and the supply of advanced technological services.

In summary, this strategy represents the new way for the Library *to be in the world*, assuming its role as a relevant instrument for opening fresh possibilities to the Congressional community.

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