

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL VALUES ON LIBRARY PERFORMANCE

By Mariam Ginman

1. Areas of emphasis in library activities

The professional view of responsibility and areas of emphasis in library activities imply crucial internal factors for change. During the past hundred years, the professional view has shifted and three main successive trends can be identified:

- a view of library sociology
- a view of information centre ideology
- a view of total responsibility of information provision implying process thinking and result-oriented goal-setting.

The role of the library as a social and educational institution

The simultaneous surge of sociological research in Germany and in the USA, especially at the University of Chicago, in the 1920s gave birth to library sociology. The social and educational role of the library was focused on, which resulted in regarding the library as a social institution. (Miksa, 1992). This view spread rapidly all over the world. The library began to be understood as an important component in cultural development as well as in shaping social justice and equality in society. The new view affected the speech and language librarians began to use in reference to their work. It also affected the administration and goal-setting of libraries, more specifically the planning of various library activities, and consequently library building.

This view of the responsibility and goal-setting of libraries as an institution was a dominant trend for several decades. Library activities became tightly linked with library organization and library science became identified as a „place/space science“. Research analyses focused on the activities and the properties spanned by this „place/space“. Therefore libraries in practice gathered almost all activities

and acquired almost all information media which gave foundation for the cultural and scientific provision in society.

The role of the library as an information centre

During the second half of this century another view began to emerge (Miksa, 1992). It had its origin in the research of the 1950s which developed a system for interpreting signals in mathematical terms and analyses resulting in a variety of models for document retrieval and knowledge representation. The disciplines underlying this development were communications science, cybernetics, information processing and cognitive sciences. This research trend gained several adherents with a new notion of the responsibility of the library; library was seen as a system of human communication. The library was begun to be understood as an information centre with emphasis on the storage, retrieval and use of information. New methods for analysis (e.g. bibliometrics), new tasks (e.g. information search) and new terminology (e.g. the word „information“) came into being. Information was defined as something that flows in a system, which can be measured in various scales and which can be controlled. Libraries had new departments organized for performing information searches, and this new service form had implications on the space division in libraries.

The relationship between the different roles

Today we see that these paradigms have a strong causal relationship and are both indispensable for a harmonious development of information provision. Their interdependence has been emphasized particularly at the face of the information society, in which the social and economic role of information is becoming more and more significant. At the same time the areas of emphasis in the professional responsibility have been influenced by new trendy tendencies of our day, such as holism.

The holistic view - from place/space to process

In most disciplines, researchers try to bring together fragmented research results to form an integrated view of man, nature, society etc. Today this trend may be caused by various factors, but originally it was influenced by the new possibilities created by mathematics and information processing. Having methods for analysing large quantities of data and being able to combine them to new unities, structures, patterns, made researchers strive for a new understanding of previously unknown connections and phenomena.

In the context of library and information science, holism contributed to a „unifying“ insight into the discipline, i.e. made it possible to define and analyze

the responsibility of the discipline in relation to the whole. It was asked what form, what content, what scope was concerned in the studies of library and information science. And questions concerning the relation of library and information science and the flow of information in society began to be more and more crucial and pronounced.

The role of the library as an intermediary is emphasized. Today's library is shifting from a collection-based ownership to an access-based intermediary activity, i.e. information is readily retrieved when needed - instead of collecting it for potential request.

2. External factors

2.1 The service requirements of the library users

What are the needs of the users when they come to the library?

In principle it lies in the responsibility of the scientific library to be able to give a satisfactory answer for the following user needs:

1. need for document
2. need for information
3. need for place/space for intellectual work

Need for document

Today many libraries are trying to meet the need for document by „libromatic service“. This is achieved by appropriate provision of self service equipments for the library users to locate, to access library materials and to check them out of the library. This implies that the library provides services which save the user's time and effort, such as document delivery. This also requires well organized collections, efficient tools for location, a sufficient number of automatik copying and lending machines as well as a lot of working space. Moreover, this means giving up the idea of conventional book stacks and document stores. The collections of library materials will be situated in an active working area with plenty of light and space for intellectual and physical communication. Library users may feel free and comfortable to sit down to read and study documents, copy them without disturbing other users. The collections of library materials shall be easily accessible. This makes a requirement for an extreme flexibility of space. Only thus is it possible for it to follow the changing demands caused by the changes in the principles underlying the library activities, e.g. the demand made by a shift from the printed format to the electronic.

Concerning the meeting of the library user's information need, two different trends prevail: on the one side more and more often the end users themselves search databases; on the other users need more and more assistance, i.e. instructions in the use of information tools available, training in collecting, choosing, assessing and distribution information, and especially in search strategy formulations at the face of masses of information in global networked systems.

Need for place/space for study and research

It is difficult for a scientific library to realize the dream of its status as an intellectual centre if it cannot meet the teachers', students' researchers' need for space for study and research. University teaching and learning is becoming more and more a problem-based team work, which brings students in large numbers to libraries. They need a place for group work with facilities for electronic information search. They need reading rooms and computer carrels for writing their assignments.

The researchers need what are called scientific sitting rooms to keep abreast with current information as well as working and reading rooms for a more systematic study and research.

Space for the personnel

The requirement for organizing service-oriented library activities leads to the requirement for organizing the internal library practices and routines - i.e. the library tasks essential and indispensable for providing the services - according to user needs. The underlying principle of „one stop shop“ means that users do not have to go from the lending office to the interlending office or further to the office of information service; all their information-related needs are taken care of at one service point. This organization model can be built on a close team work and a large responsibility on the part of the library personnel; the space structure can promote cooperation and internal communication.

2.2 The impact of telematics

One important factor shaping the work in the libraries of the future is modern information and communications technology.

The first movement of information technology swept over libraries a decade or so ago. As a consequence e.g. many manual routines became automated. Conventional library services were performed with new, faster, and more effective methods.

The second movement of information technology is now sweeping over many libraries, Global electronic information networking has brought forth unforeseen service forms and related routines. They give libraries an opportunity to link databases, to organize the acquisition and distribution of information via campuses and global networks, as well as the bibliographic control and distribution of easily available information resources. Through their work stations, libraries may provide users access to information in a variety of databases: bibliographic, full-text, fact or multimedia with interactive access to text, voice and image. Never before have libraries been so open for various kinds of partnerships in various fields. In many universities there is a close cooperation between libraries and computing centres, enterprises and organizations both of private and public sector.

The third movement is still to be seen in the near future. It is difficult to envisage by the existing phenomena and services so far provided. What is certain is that information provision takes less and less place within library walls and more and more space outside library walls - in cyberspace.

The primary idea of the librarian's role will not change, however. The principal task for the librarian will still be to act as an intermediary between the information producer and the information consumer, i.e. to act as a vital link in the process of information provision. What is concerned at the very core of this task is how to analyze information resources and how to make them available and accessible according to user needs.

3. Concluding remarks

The acceleration and power of this development depends on the intellectual and material resources of individual libraries. Never before has the future of libraries been so closely tied to the proactive potential of the profession. The issue which all libraries must take a stand on today is: Will libraries plan for, participate in and respond to the drastic changes which are to come. We will have a diversity of solutions. Therefore it is impossible to envisage in detail today what libraries will look like tomorrow - after five or ten years.

References

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