
Changing World, Changing Libraries

New Literacies, New User Needs, and Leadership for Change

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Strategic planning discussions and reorganization scenarios have led me recently to think about and read about change. It has struck a chord, and I want to share what I have learned. The time for those of us who work in and lead libraries to plan for change is now. Consider the following research results.

A 2011 OCLC study of its members found that the nearly 2000 respondents, including directors, managers, and librarians, consider licensed electronic resource collections to be a top priority.¹ Academic librarians, who made up about half of the respondents, are currently focused on e-books and other electronic resources as well as on discovery tools. Public librarians were concerned with e-books and electronic resources, and were focused on providing Internet access. The highest priority for public libraries was demonstrating library value to funders, but there was little interest in discovery tools.² To stay current, respondents in all types of libraries use electronic discussion lists and email; few use social media. How do we compare to our users?

The world is changing quickly. Many library users show a marked preference for both mobile resources and social media. Facebook is the most popular website. Nielsen's Fall 2011 *Social Media Report* found that social media, including blogs, reach 80 percent of those using the Internet.³ More people are using the Internet, and broadband access is rising, even if use is not always following. On August 21, 2012, the FCC issued its annual report on the number of American locations without broadband access.⁴ The report noted that efforts are bringing great progress in access to both "wireline" and wireless broadband, but also that technology does not stand still and issues of speed are still important.⁵

At the same time, more teachers and college faculty are embedding social media in the classroom. An infographic from onlinecolleges.net, titled *A Teacher's Guide to Social Media*, states that "2/3 of all faculty have used social media during a class."⁶

Several recent reports from the Pew Internet & American Life Project support these notions of change. In March 2012, researchers found that nearly half of American adults are smartphone users.⁷ A June 2012 report by the Project states that 88 percent of US adults own a cell phone as of April 2012 and 55 percent use this phone to go online. The authors go on to note that 31 percent of these current cell Internet users primarily use their cell phones to access the Internet rather than some other type of computer and that this is particularly true of nonwhites and young adults.⁸

Use of e-books and other longer electronic information resources is rising. An April 2012 report from the Pew Internet

and American Life Project reported that one-fifth (21 percent) of American adults had read an electronic book in the previous year, noting that this number grew with 2011 holiday gift-giving from 17 percent to 21 percent.⁹ The report mentions a different study that showed 43 percent of Americans age sixteen and above had read an e-book or a longer form of content such as a magazine, journal, or news article in digital format using an e-book reader, tablet, or regular computer or a cell phone during 2011.

In another study, however, Pew researchers found that, although three quarters of American libraries lend e-books in some way, only 22 percent of respondents knew that their libraries made e-books available. The authors also interviewed librarians, finding that “patrons and librarians were fairly uncertain about the exact way that libraries would function in the future.” Both librarians and users believe that major change is inevitable, but there is no consensus on what form that change will take.¹⁰

The ways that readers use webpages may also be changing. Two recent articles by Richard Macmanus posted on the ReadWriteWeb site suggest that “there’s simply too much content to consume nowadays, so the great challenge of online publishing is to organize it better.”¹¹ The articles discuss the move back to webpages organized by subject, in such resources as Pinterest and Medium that can have implications important to library websites. Although these categories are achieved by user tags rather than expert librarian organization, this opinion should be of obvious interest to libraries because providing context is what we do. In his second article, Macmanus notes that newspaper topic pages are not much used, perhaps primarily because, similarly to library webpages, few other pages link to them leading to their lack of representation in Google search results, and also because most users have learned to read information chronologically. He notes that sites such as Pinterest “layer topic pages on top of user-generated, social content.”¹²

Kirsten Purcell in a June 7, 2012 presentation to the State University of New York Librarians Association Annual Conference talked about the future roles of librarians in this new technological environment, basing her remarks on the research Pew has recently completed. She predicts that librarians will have roles in locating the highest quality information as sentries, evaluators, filters, and certifiers, and also in helping users put the information they find into action by performing such duties as aggregator or synthesizer, organizer, network node, and facilitator.¹³

An article published last year should be required reading for all of us. Connaway, Dickey, and Radford wrote about the concept of convenience. Convenience was studied through a re-examination of information gathered in 2004–6. The concept of convenience is not new, but it is likely that some of these findings are even more important now in the context of current technologies. The authors made several important points, many of which we have known for some time. As we look at our own processes and policies, what needs to change to meet the needs they identified?

- These days the time and attention of users are scarce, while resources are abundant. Users can and do find information from many sources.
- Convenience variables include resource choice, ease of access, ease of use, and the ability to get what is needed quickly.
- Students (both graduate and undergraduate) preferred search engines, but faculty were somewhat more positive about the use of library databases.
- Faculty members were interested in authoritative information and knew they could find it through the library.
- Users do not like library catalogs (and databases) that are hard to use.
- When asked about ideal information conditions, users desired convenience, a resource that searched inside of books, search resources that searched multiple resources, easy delivery, and alerts about new information of interest.
- Users value convenience in both access and time.
- Major issues were “satisficing” (good enough), ease of use, and saving time, including instant access at a click. Users also desired seamless and complete access rather than just citations, and 24/7 access.¹⁴

The Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries (ERIAL) project undertaken in five smaller universities in Illinois looked carefully at user behavior.

The participants found several important pieces of information about college students:

- Students are not as tech savvy as we think.
- Many students do not really know how to search, in either Google or library databases. They did not learn information literacy skills when they were in high school, despite the best efforts of school librarians. They just trust Google to find the right information for them.¹⁵
- Students do not see librarians as experts who can help them.
- Professors and librarians overestimate the research skills of undergraduate students. As a result, librarians do not take time to explain things in terms students can understand. The ERIAL team also noted that establishing strong relationships between librarians and teaching faculty is critical to our success in reaching students.¹⁶

All of these studies and discussions contribute to the urgency of our planning process. Librarians must determine better ways to help users while being cognizant that most of the users they are helping want to get research done and go do something else. We cannot find these better ways unless we know more about our users and about the changes technology is making in the environments of both users and librarians.

The issue of change must be at the forefront of planning in all libraries, regardless of size. Both economic realities and the impacts of technology have the potential to greatly alter the way libraries are organized, the services libraries provide, and

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the work that is done by library employees. The June 2011 report from ALA, *Confronting the Future: Strategic Visions for the 21st Century Public Library*, begins the discussion of strategic changes for public libraries.¹⁷ The discussion, though, is far from being completed.

EDUCATING OURSELVES AND OUR USERS

All of these studies reinforce the point that it is increasingly important that we educate ourselves, as well as the people we serve, to work in this new environment. But what do we and they need to know?

Lee Rainie of the Pew Internet and American Life Project has posited several literacies that we and our users need to know more about to be successful in the future. These include:

- graphic literacy, essentially visual and screen literacy;
- navigation literacy, the ability to move confidently around a nonlinear environment;
- context literacy, the ability to find and make connections among disparate pieces of information;
- focus literacy, the ability to think deeply and to enjoy both leisure and daydreaming;
- skepticism literacy, the ability to evaluate information and its sources;
- ethical literacy, living responsibly in both the physical and the cyberspace world; and
- personal literacy, in which the user understands his identity and can manage privacy.¹⁸

More recently, Howard Rheingold, noted writer, speaker, and thinker on issues related to online communities and collective intelligence, in his 2012 book *Net Smart*, advocated the development of skills that will allow users of technology to “live mindfully in cyberculture” and declared that it is a skill that is as important for civilization as for individuals.¹⁹ Rheingold believes that we are “in a period where the cutting edge of change has moved from the technology to the literacies made possible by the technology.”²⁰ These literacies are very close to the knowledge and skill set we have, for a number of years, envisioned as the mark of an information literate person. At the same time, they are both personal and tied to the broader community. They are

- the ability to focus and pay attention to what one is doing;
- “crap detection”—learning how and where to search and how to evaluate results;
- knowing how to participate effectively;
- understanding effective ways to coordinate, cooperate, and collaborate with others; and
- “network smarts”—understanding the structure of social networks and how to be part of them, including an understanding of issues of privacy.²¹

Libraries fit into the educational continuum that will help technology users to develop skills that will allow them to find, evaluate, and use information resources. However, we will not be able to do this work without understanding the process and the rules, particularly in areas of social media, participation, and collaboration.

For libraries to “keep up” with changes, we need to develop a culture of learning inside libraries of all types as well as the personal attitudes to support that culture. We also need to create urgency, both in our libraries and in our professional organizations, for change. The ability to adapt to changing realities is crucial to the future of libraries as well as to the future of librarians.

THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC ACTION

Change is really difficult. We know we need to do it, but it is often unsettling, even agonizing. We also feel that we know what our users ought to be learning and doing, and that they may not know what is right for them. That sort of thinking can cause real problems, though. Libraries do not have enough money and other resources to make many mistakes. Good data are essential, but we can learn from our colleagues in other fields as well.

No one likes change. It is uncomfortable for both us and our users. Whenever I think of change, I remember the library patron who wrote to our comments link when we changed our library website not long after the Iraq invasion. He told us that what we had done to the library website ranked right up there with the 2003 burning of the Iraq National Library. That remark conveys such a vivid picture that all of us who work on the website still remember it eight years later. At the same time, though, there are great risks in not developing a planned program to review user needs and to accommodate them in library resources and service. I believe that planning for change is an important part of all of our responsibilities, whether or not we are managers or directors.

But how and where do we begin? There is a great deal of literature about the right way to make changes in the business setting that can provide us with good models to use. The research of both Rosabeth Moss Kanter and John P. Kotter, begun in the 1990s and continuing into this decade, tells us that change should focus on people. Emotions and feelings are important to the success of any change. In fact, both authors note that behavior change happens when participants’ emotions are engaged, when participants feel included and heard. Innovation, collaboration, and learning are key to the change process.

Kotter is well-known for his eight steps to successful change, beginning with the fact that people change because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings:²²

1. Develop a sense of urgency for the change, so that colleagues feel the need for change now.
2. Build a team to guide the change that includes a mix of

levels in the organization.

3. Create a clear and simple vision with clear goals that can be articulated quickly.
4. Communicate widely to get buy-in.
5. Empower the actions of the members of the staff by removing obstacles, providing information and feedback, and rewarding appropriate behavior.
6. Create short-term wins.
7. Don't let up.
8. Make change stick, by choosing tasks in a sequence that leads to the fulfillment of the vision and nurturing a new culture that rewards the change.²³

Kanter looks at the intangibles of organizations to make recommendations for successful change. Based on her research in business, sports, and nonprofit organizations, she notes that confidence, defined as “positive expectations for favorable outcomes,”²⁴ is a key factor in both innovation and success, and that confidence and positive attitudes are based on the support system, teamwork, accountability, initiative, and communication.²⁵ She notes that “powerlessness corrupts,” reminding her readers that powerlessness is caused by limiting information and “sneaking unpopular decisions through when they think no one’s looking” resulting in negativity and low aspirations.²⁶ Kanter states that “in change-adapt organizations, people continuously learn and adapt, spread knowledge and share ideas. By making change a way of life, people are, in the best sense, ‘just doing their jobs.’”²⁷

Kanter’s “Change Wheel” has some similarities with Kotter’s eight steps to successful change. The wheel supports empowerment, a culture of sharing information, communicating about change before it happens, milestones, training and feedback, rewards and recognition, and inspiration. The spokes on the wheel are the following:

- Create a common theme for the change message and a shared vision internalized by all.
- Send the right message with symbols and signals of change.
- Create a guidance structure and process for leading change.
- Use education, training, and action tools to communicate what, why, and how.
- Find champions and sponsors of change.
- Celebrate quick wins and local innovations done by units based on the shared vision.
- Value communication and exchange of best practices.
- Reassess and realign policies and procedures to support the new direction.
- Establish change measures, set milestones, and create a feedback loop.
- Provide rewards and recognition for meeting milestones.²⁸

Leaders of change, according to Kanter, need to be aware of the classic reasons for resistance to change and to avoid or counteract them:

- loss of face
- loss of control
- excess uncertainty
- surprise and the resulting automatic defensiveness
- the “difference” effect
- “can I do it?”
- ripple effects from annoyance at disruptions to other activities
- more work
- past resentments
- real threats and anger that the change will inflict real pain and create clear losers²⁹

She exhorts leaders to nurture skills in “tuning in to the environment, kaleidoscopic thinking, [creating] an inspiring vision, coalition-building, nurturing a working team, persisting through difficulties, and spreading credit and recognition.”³⁰

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP

Reading between the lines in the material above, we can see that successful change does not happen without good leadership. In his recent blog post, “Learning to Lead Others to Change” in *Leading from the Library*, Steven Bell asks, “Great leaders have a way of inspiring followers to believe in a cause that makes them want to change. . . . What does it take to be that kind of leader?” The author notes that a primary criterion for change leadership is to develop trust in your ideas, by “being predictable, consistent, able to articulate the vision, and honest, and . . . fulfill promises.”³¹

John P. Kotter provides a blueprint to follow. In his article “Leading Change: Learn to Do It Right,” he notes three key tasks of an effective leader:

- “managing multiple time lines”—making it clear that meaningful change takes time, and creating “shorter-term wins” that move toward an effective vision
- “building coalitions”—finding a strong team, expanding it to cover a number of views, building support, and leading the group so that it works together as a team, rather than as a group of individuals
- creating a vision of the future that is clear, appealing, and ambitious yet attainable

He defines a great leader as one who sees clearly, is not afraid to challenge the status quo, is energetic, holds deep convictions about the cause, and is willing to learn and take risks. Kotter notes that “producing change is about 80 percent leadership—establishing direction, aligning, motivating, and inspiring people—and about 20 percent management—planning budgeting organizing and problem-solving.”³²

Leadership must begin at the top, of course, but it cannot end there. I believe that every member of the organization must take some responsibility for leadership—for listening,

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for speaking up with ideas, agreements and concerns, and for moving the process forward.

CHANGE AND ALA

This need for change is not just limited to our libraries and our work arrangements. It is an issue that affects ALA as well. The 2012–13 ALA president, Maureen Sullivan, believes that it will be important to re-imagine ALA. She believes that recent ALA reports, the economy and library budgets, the ALA 2015 goals, and changes in the larger environment make this necessary. In her proposed 2012–2013 budget, she states “it is time to give serious consideration to restructuring ALA.” She notes “any plan to do this requires careful consideration of feasibility, desirability and complexity of such an undertaking”³³ and led discussions with ALA leaders at the fall 2012 joint boards meeting on this topic.

In RUSA, our Structures Task Force in 2011–12 provided a series of actions that will, we believe, result in more members and better service for these members, both new and returning. This year, I hope to build on that work with a review of publishing and continuing education activities, shown by our recent membership study as a very high priority of RUSA members.

GETTING STARTED

How do we get started? The first step is to create an urgency or desire for change to start the ball rolling. In this process, we can identify where large changes and incremental changes will work most effectively. That means a first step will be to know ourselves. A second and equally important step will be to gather meaningful input from those we serve. We need to be careful not to move so slowly that everyone becomes discouraged and to make sure that we keep communication lines flowing throughout the process. Hopefully, we will develop a culture that supports and encourages both learning and regular change to maintain our relevance.

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