Library Administration's Responsibilities Outside the Library: The Consortium for Public Library Innovation

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AN INTERESTING PHENOMENON has evolved over the past few years, one which is both complex and contradictory. The profession, caught up in the general societal reaction to government spending at all levels, is finding it increasingly difficult to determine the best course of action to take in response to these pressures. As one reaction to the demands of fiscal accountability and constraint, library administrators appear anxious to try various "innovative" practices, be they so-called "modern management styles" or new library services.

At the same time, even a casual perusal of the literature reveals an increasing skepticism on the part of various authors, who suggest that these responses may be dangerous or counterproductive. Many of these articles are ego-centered and/or lack an empirical basis. They reflect a growing frustration which the fears and uncertainties that abound under existing economic conditions inevitably produce.

During an arbitrarily selected period of September 1978 through February 1979, the popular library periodicals *American Libraries* and *Library Journal* contained such articles as: "AACR 2 Advice"; "Managing Technological Change"; "Strategies for Change"; "A National Periodicals Center: Articulating the Dream"; "User Fees I: The Economic Argument"; "User Fees II: The Library Response"; "For Public Libraries the Poor Pay More"; "Federal Aid and Local Spending: Stim-

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ulation vs. Substitution"; and "Casualty Reports." These titles were selected for two reasons: (1) they indicate the scope of problems facing library administrators, most of which originate outside the library or involve external library decisions; and (2) these articles reflect the complexity of problems and the contradictions and/or disagreements which exist within each problem or issue.

As a student in one of this author's doctoral seminars observed, the recent literature on library administration confirms that the gap between theoretician and practitioner continues to widen. He was particularly struck by Noël Savage's "News Report 1978."[1] While Savage discusses the economy, illiteracy, Proposition 13, networks, new technology, copyright, and so on, there is no discussion of management issues per se. It is difficult to believe that in 1978 there was no development in administrative areas which would concern librarians. Michael Grunberger concludes that the Savage report "is an outline of the crises facing the library manager; the fragmented presentation of the issues in the *Library Journal* article mirrors the lack of a theoretical framework and the fragmented approach of today's library administrators."[2]

In light of the omissions in Savage's report, the article by Richard De Gennaro in *Library Journal* is indicative of the confusion which exists. De Gennaro observes: "After a while, I began to suspect that the reality of what we managers were experiencing in our day-to-day activities had more validity than the theoretical world of management that was being described in books and articles written by management professors and social scientists."[3] Yet, as the relatively inexperienced but perceptive doctoral student counters: "De Gennaro's approach is a mixed bag of ideas from different management schools. . . . [and] leaves the practitioner with the sense that management theory has nothing to offer; De Gennaro's article contains ample evidence of the contributions made to his management style from the very management theories he rejects."[4]

How does the library administration reasonably function and respond in such a delicate and confused environment? What factors are central to an understanding of these circumstances? Are the issues really so "either-or," as they are too often presented? No rational professional would argue that the line between outside and inside responsibility is all that clear. To whom — people, groups, organizations, boards — does the library administration turn for helpful assistance?

THE LIBRARY BOARD ROLE

Assuming that the library administration has decided to seek outside organizational alliances in anticipation of or in response to unmet needs, how does it manage to secure the legitimacy needed to persist in such an arrangement? The library board may provide both an important legal and political role. At the 1978 ALA conference in Chicago, Martin D. Phelan, library trustee, stated in his keynote address:

> The Board, in its role of representing the using public to the library has a prime position [in determining library objectives]. The administrator, knowing the practical strengths and weaknesses of the library, has the power to balance imaginative flights with good horse sense. To guide both, a community survey will point to those potentials in local librarydom which have the potential for revision, expansion, innovation or whatever.[5]

It is unwise for the library administration to exclude the board as it ventures into new service areas, particularly if these areas include external arrangements, such as membership in a network or consortium. In a 1977 *Illinois Libraries* issue devoted to trustees, the argument is offered that professional librarians alone cannot generate the support required to elevate public libraries into a priority position for increased budgetary support from all levels of government. In this same issue, Jean Baron, former trustee, expresses her conviction that active and informed library board members have the clout to solve the financial problems which plague so many libraries.[6]

The justification for such optimism is very debatable. What is more interesting, though, is the push by the American Library Trustees Association (ALTA) for an active involvement of trustees with library administration far beyond present levels. Trustees are being urged by their leaders to evaluate administrators in terms of clearly established measurable service objectives, rather than narrowly worded job descriptions. They are being told that they should push their administrations to look outside the library, to initiate community surveys, service evaluations, better management reporting systems, and so on. Whether and where trustees will find the time and expertise to take such an active role in a productive and positive manner remains to be seen. There is little doubt in this writer's mind that library administrations will feel increased pressure from their boards to do more with less resources.

Library administrations must move positively and quickly to encourage their boards to reinforce and to support carefully considered outside alliances, especially in light of the ostensible role which trustees are asking of themselves. By their very nature, the library administration's responsibility and actions outside the library are tentative compared to the more routine and well-established internal operations. Success more often than not hinges on the policy-makers' overt approval and understanding of the administration's actions, be they the decision to buy a million-dollar computer, charge user fees, abide by AACR II, or pay fees to join a consortium. Moreover, until and unless new service styles become integrated into the library's overall policy, the odds are that the library will retreat to business as usual.

GOALS, GUIDELINES, STANDARDS

As most readers are aware, the Public Library Association charged its Goals, Guidelines and Standards Committee to revise library standards in 1970. The committee decided to turn these standards around, basing them on the needs of communities and individuals rather than on those of an institution, thus giving the standards an "outside" orientation. In 1977 the U.S. Office of Education funded a 2-year study entitled "The Process of Standards Development for Community Library Service." The principal investigator is Vernon E. Palmour, senior vice-president of King Research, Inc. Phase II of the project is to be completed by June 1979. The last and most critical phase is not likely to be funded in the near future.[7]

The significance of the standards development, even if never fully realized, is the explicit obligation placed on library administrations to orient outside their respective institutions. As stated in the December 1978 final draft issued by the Goals, Guidelines and Standards Committee:

> The single most important recommendation of these guidelines is that future standards for public libraries must flow from the *needs of users,* rather than from the *needs of the institution.* This means that specific, quantifiable, measurable objectives must be determined by each public library and public library system in terms of *local* needs. The obligation of all local public libraries and library systems to conduct a continuous assessment of community needs and continuous evaluation of the degree to which the library meets these needs, is the basic imperative of this document.[8]

The report of the Subcommittee on Implications for Service and Programs for the Mission Statement, as written in the committee's final report, was forwarded to the chair of the PLA Goals, Guidelines and Standards Committee on April 10, 1978. The subcommittee was headed by Marie Davis, associate director of the Free Library of Philadelphia, who also prepared the report. The document is excellent and should be read in full by every interested professional, for it deals directly with the problems inherent in library administration's responsibilities outside the library. Furthermore, the subcommittee document cuts through the contradictory rhetoric and conclusions on major problems by succinctly pointing out some of the realities which the library community faces. Some of the more penetrating observations of the Davis subcommittee are:

> Fiscal realities have shown that we have moved beyond an expansionist philosophy of public libraries. It will be necessary to define types of library service which can be considered viable in different settings under different financial conditions. The disparity among large, medium and small, rural, suburban and urban libraries must be recognized in this connection. Suitable options for quality service will need to be developed, and more effective means devised to interrelate types of public libraries. . . .
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> A stronger justification is needed for the public library to take leadership within the total library community for delivery of information services. The cooperation of the past has become in fact competition for funding and recognition. Full collaboration cannot be achieved until public, university, school and special libraries work together at the administrative and management level to share funds and objectives for programs as well as responsibilities for various clienteles. . . .
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> The Mission Statement calls for a national library policy for services and programs. To implement the goals of the Mission Statement it will be necessary to review the roles of the Office of Libraries and Learning Resources in the Office of Education, the National Commission on Libraries, and the Library of Congress to determine if they are indeed effective instruments to carry forward the mission, collectively or individually. The statement suggests the possibility of a national library "ministry" or regional library "authority" to undertake the strong leadership required. Coincidentally, the roles of the American Library

Association and its Washington office as well as all state library associations should be considered. . . .

On the local level an education program for librarians, trustees and community leaders alike is essential so that they may learn to work together to develop viable program objectives for their libraries in accordance with the principle of assessment, library outputs and subsequent evaluation. Care must be taken to avoid shifting emphases based on whims of vocal elements of the community which may not be truly representative of the cross section. Sane and reasonable guarantees of continuity of service and programs must be assured despite the possibilities for disruption of an orderly review and accountability procedure.[9]

Davis also asked nonlibrarians to present their views on the "Mission Statement." Five of the responses received were published in *Public Libraries* and provide extraordinary insights on some of the realities confronting library administration. Thomas F. Deahl, proprietor and principal consultant ASIS chairman, observed: "In short, I doubt that the public library can survive in anything resembling its present form. Shifting its focus to nonprint media and couching its justification in terms of the vehicle for preserving continuity with the past and thus the cultural bridge to the future are tactics that merely delay the inevitable."[10] Dennis Clark, a historian, concluded: "The active role assumed by libraries also requires a higher code of *ethics* for personnel. It should be tough and acute and make librarians who share it proud and vigilant."[11]

An educator and public library trustee made the following observation: "The statement presages an expanded role for library trustees, as representatives of the total community served by the institution. It argues persuasively against the traditionally elitist trustee population now serving many public libraries and may suggest different modes of selection in some instances."[12] The observations made by Henry C. Messinger, Majority Leader, State of Pennsylvania, are especially interesting. He questioned how useful the "Mission Statement" is from a "realistic commonsense approach" and detected an elitist slant to some of the responsibilities placed on the public library, e.g., as the principal agency in determining what information should be retained for future generations and what removed. He then remarked:

The mission statement sets out an ambitious, far-reaching proposal for public libraries in the future — too ambitious and far-reaching in some respects. Those who direct the future course of

libraries would be well advised that whatever role they seek to fill, they should count on doing that through their own financial resources and devices. It takes no great foresight to suggest that government will be unable in the foreseeable future to offer much in the way of financial aid.[13]

CONSORTIUM FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY INNOVATION

The pressures on library administrators to orient outside their institutions have increased greatly. The attendant problems are many. Few, if any, strategic and tactical procedures exist to assist these administrators in their interaction with the changing community infrastructure, whether on an individual or organizational basis.

That the PLA Subcommittee report called for a fundamental assessment of existing library leadership ought to be seen as a critical issue. The response from nonlibrarians to the PLA "Mission Statement" is important in that the recurring theme is a plea for imaginative, informed approaches by the public library. A fundamental assessment of the library and information community is not likely to occur, at least in the near future.

Is the library administration caught in a vicious cycle? On one hand, they are surrounded by conflicting opinions on major issues. On the other hand they are urged, if not ordered, by policy-makers and community and professional leaders to engage actively in new service styles oriented away from traditional service patterns. Do any viable alternatives exist for library administrations, given these factors?

At least one of many possible approaches was selected by a small group of public libraries which formally established the Consortium for Public Library Innovation (CPLI)* in July 1976. Its formation was the direct consequence of an experience shared by ten public library systems, scattered throughout the continental United States, in a 3-year experimental program conducted under the auspices of the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB).[14] The CEEB national project was established to determine if public libraries could or should offer specialized services to self-motivated adult learners who had decided to bypass and/or supplement traditional educational institutions. That effort has been well-documented in the literature and is covered in the article by Boles and Smith in this issue.

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* The author has been actively involved with CPLI from its inception. No claim is made for complete objectivity, although most of the CPLI account here is primarily descriptive.

The experience with the CEEB project led almost naturally, although not easily, to the formation of CPLI. In fact, through the impetus of CEEB, discussions were started in early 1975 in which the library representatives considered what actions to take once the project ended. CEEB Project Director Jose Orlando Toro felt deeply that public libraries needed to assume greater responsibility for their collective decision-making. It was believed that the existing library community could not or would not fill the vacuum once the national project was concluded in June 1976.

The analysis of the CEEB project proved very important in the conceptualization and planning of CPLI. Of particular significance was the following conclusion:

> First, the present allocation of funds to the various interests and departments within a public library often conflicts with the alternative uses of these existing resources for a new general service that goes across all these interests and departments. Second, the Learner's Advisory Service has generated additional threats to the morale of professionals who are comfortable with existing practices and a segmented departmentalized approach to service and clients. Third, the manner in which planning and evaluation is presently carried out typically does not provide an avenue for introducing innovations. Current library practices focus on acquiring, organizing and preserving collections of materials, practices that are rarely appropriately evaluated. Models to effect changes in the delivery of a responsive service to the individual are frequently hampered by a preoccupation with this function of warehousing and the provision of a mass service through brief reference interviews characteristic of the main or central library of large systems. Fourth, organizational problems in the public library identify communications difficulties and role conflicts at points of exchange. The question of who talks to whom in disseminating the innovation and the roles that are assumed in the exchange demand a more direct approach that goes beyond merely providing information on the achievements of a given project.[15]

The structuring of the CEEB project helped determine the organizational format for CPLI. Specifically, two key groups were established: the Policy Study Group, made up of the directors of each participating library; and the Research Study Group, composed primarily of second-

line managers who were responsible for overseeing the service, particularly in the areas of data collection, training and management evaluation.

The authors of the CEEB *Final Report* concluded that four essential conditions were necessary if an innovative service was to succeed in any given library:

1. The top administration must be actively in support of the service;
2. The central facility (in the case of a multi-unit library) must be deeply involved in providing the service;
3. The key library policy makers must establish a personnel system which recognizes and rewards outstanding performance and does not reward "non-professional" attitudes and behavior. . . . ; and
4. The service planners must continually monitor service provision procedures to insure that advisors continue to offer the service as planned. In any situation where innovative programs are being tested, there is a propensity for new procedures to be rejected or ignored due to uncertainty, unfamiliarity and lack of understanding.[16]

In late 1975, Toro and DeProspo sent a memo to the participating libraries in which they observed: "It was recognized that, in the final analysis, the burden of responsibility for a determination of the critical issues or questions rests with the primary decision-makers in each library."[17] Thus, the directors formed the Policy Study Group and met in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on February 2-3, 1976, to discuss continuation after the conclusion of the national project.

At that meeting the directors unanimously agreed to form CPLI. It was decided that a transition period was needed and that, at least for the first year, the primary focus should remain with the Learner's Advisory Service. The group elected Pat Woodrum, then acting director of the Tulsa City-County Library System, to chair CPLI. CPLI leaders submitted a proposal to the Council on Library Resources (CLR) for a small "developmental" grant. CLR agreed to assist CPLI for its first year of operation by accepting the $10,000 proposal.

A national coordinator was selected from the Research Study Group, Thomas C. Phelps of the Salt Lake City Public Library, and Ernest DeProspo was asked to serve as consultant for technical assistance and evaluative research. CPLI estimated that through membership fees and

other support services, not including indirect costs, their contribution to consortium activities would total $30,000 for the first year.

At the time CPLI formed, the libraries involved were: Atlanta Public Library, Denver Public Library, Enoch Pratt Free Library (Baltimore), Miami-Dade Public Library, Minneapolis Public Library, Portland (Maine) Public Library, Salt Lake City Public Library, St. Louis Public Library, Tulsa City-County Library, and the Free Public Library of Woodbridge (New Jersey). At the end of CPLI's first year (July 1977), the Atlanta, Denver, Miami-Dade and St. Louis libraries discontinued membership. During the second year of operation, the Washington State Library, Houston Public Library and East Brunswick (New Jersey) Public Library joined, while Enoch Pratt Free Library decided to withdraw. For the third and current year, the Tacoma (Washington) and Ocean County (New Jersey) libraries joined CPLI.[18]

Given the mission of CPLI (see below), shifting membership is not only understandable but expected. There are many factors responsible, be they change of directors, new building projects, drastic budget cuts, or, most important of all, the readiness of a library to carry out the objectives of CPLI. Various levels of leadership and ability exist within the libraries. Many librarians became disillusioned quickly, even though CPLI stressed that patience is needed whenever efforts toward basic change are tried. Many libraries have joined for the wrong reasons.

The most significant meeting for CPLI took place during the 1977 ALA meeting in Detroit. By that time a number of pivotal decisions had been made. The most important were: (1) CPLI would not depend on outside monies for its existence, (2) CPLI activities would focus more directly on management practices, (3) dues would be increased from $200 to $1000 a year to ensure that all member libraries take their commitment to CPLI seriously,[19] and (4) all members would be required to adhere to CPLI policy through the signing of a Letter of Agreement.

At the Detroit meeting, those libraries continuing with CPLI elected Joseph Kimbrough, director of the Minneapolis Public Library, as chair for 1977-78, and approved a set of policies, procedures and operating guidelines. The policy statement followed the planning and evaluation framework developed by DeProspo as part of the CEEB project which had been tested and utilized by the participating libraries.[20]

The most important features of the policy statement are:

    I. Goal statement: overall improvement of public library services that are clearly user-centered, through systematic research and experimentation

II. Purpose: to develop useful, innovative and improved library services by means of an organization of selected public libraries committed to experimentation, research and evaluation

III. Objectives:

A. To adopt Program Planning and Evaluation as a key tool for:

1. Identification of areas where innovative and/or additional library service and management changes are needed
2. Decision-making
3. Program design
4. Evaluation of all library services and operations

B. To formulate policy based on research in library service and management.[21]

The Letter of Agreement reflects the essential components and spirit of the policy statement. Each library director and board chair is asked to sign the letter. The criteria for membership are spelled out in the agreement:

(1) To promote the adoption of Program Planning and Evaluation by the administrators of the _____ as a key tool for decision-making, program or project design, and evaluation of *all* library services and operations;

(2) To conduct research into library services and into the management of library services as a basis for formulating policy;

(3) To improve, through the planning and evaluating process, information support and advisory services for adult independent learners;

(4) To identify areas where innovative and/or additional library services and management or policy changes are needed;

(5) To disseminate the research findings of the Consortium's members to policy-makers in the library profession as well as to policy-makers in local, state and federal government;

(6) To accept and agree to the Policies, Procedures and Operating Guidelines of the Consortium for Public Library Innovation as adopted on June 20, 1977 by the Consortium Policy Group.[22]

ERNEST DEPROSPO

BRIEF REVIEW OF CPLI ACTIVITIES, 1977-79

On November 14, 1977, the CPLI chairman sent a memorandum to the Policy Study Group outlining activities for CPLI. In that memorandum, Kimbrough informed the directors that "the focus for the Consortium's activities for the next year should be on the creation of a solid management information system for the measurement and evaluation of Adult Services, especially reference service, of which the Learner's Advisory Service is a component part."[23]

During the June 1978 ALA meeting in Chicago, CPLI elected Edwin Beckerman, director of the Woodbridge Public Library, as chair and appointed Christine Murchio, projects coordinator at Woodbridge, as national coordinator. The Policy Study Group decided to continue testing the performance of adult reference service and also to begin considering ways to determine accurately the costs of that service. It was decided that both the Policy Study Group and the Research Study Group needed additional training, especially in certain research techniques. A 3-day workshop was scheduled for October 1978.

The workshop, held at the East Brunswick Public Library on October 26-27, and at the Woodbridge Public Library on October 28, focused on various topics. During the first day, Salt Lake City Public Library reported on "CPLI Methodology — PP&E as a Management Approach"; Tulsa City-County Library presented a case report on PP&E; and all libraries reported on "Policy Implications of Phase I Reports." On the second day, the group was involved in discussions centered on sampling, SPSS and interpretation of selected statistical tests. The final day was devoted to CPLI policy questions as they affect the future direction of the group.

The Policy Study Group reaffirmed its commitment to improving management practices through research and experimentation. The chair called for and received approval of additional support by member libraries, primarily through increased staff involvement, for CPLI activities. The directors were particularly in favor of increased efforts to establish better ways of determining cost-effective management systems. They recognized that such a capability, if possible, would take at least three to five years to implement. CPLI has entered the first year of testing that feasibility.

CONCLUSION

It is impossible to know at this time whether or not CPLI will be successful in achieving its objectives. The effort required to maintain the impetus for such an organization is great; the immediate payoffs highly problematic. Resistance to change is the norm, for innovation requires fundamental and conscious choice to alter behavioral patterns. Whether it is possible, or even realistic, for the library to make such fundamental adjustments is certainly open to legitimate disagreement.

The latest *American Library Directory* lists some 342 "networks, consortia and other cooperating library organizations" in the United States alone. These range from the well-known OCLC to the perhaps lesser-known Fox River Valley Area Library Cooperative. What most of these cooperative groups do is obviously not revealed in a directory. Their number does suggest that, for a variety of reasons, libraries are seeking outside organizational ties to help them better meet their responsibilities. It is most likely that library administrations will continue to search for alternate ways of meeting their perceived needs. However, unless more attention is given to the necessity of experimentation and research as guides for assisting library administrators in meeting their responsibilities and/or adjusting their perceptions, this writer is not overly optimistic about the results such alternate organizational modes will produce.

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10. "Letters to Marie: Views on the Public Library's Role," *Public Libraries* 17:2, Fall 1978.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., p. 3.

13. Ibid.

14. The author served as consultant to CEEB for Program Planning and Evaluation from Feb. 1973 through the duration of the project, which ended in June 1976.

15. Mavor, Anne S., et al. *Final Report; Part II: The Role of the Public Libraries in Adult Independent Learning.* New York, CEEB, 1976, pp. 67-68.

16. Ibid., p. 76.

17. Memorandum to CEEB project library directors from Jose Orlando Toro and Ernest R. DeProspo, Jan. 12, 1976.

18. Houston and East Brunswick will discontinue membership as of June 30, 1979. The Madison (Wisconsin) Public Library and the Monroe County Public Library System (New York) may become members of CPLI by summer 1979.

19. Membership dues are currently $700.

20. DeProspo has identified his work in measurement, planning and evaluation as "PP&E" and plans to disseminate the findings over the next two years.

21. Consortium for Public Library Innovation. "Policies, Procedures and Operating Guidelines," June 20, 1977.

22. _____. Letter of Agreement, June 20, 1977.

23. Memorandum to Consortium Policy Study Group from Joseph Kimbrough, Chairman, Nov. 14, 1977.