Library Administration in Support of Emerging Service Patterns

THOMAS W. SHAUGHNESSY

The title of this article raises at least one interesting question, that is, how any pattern of service could emerge without administrative support. Yet there is a fair amount of evidence in the literature of specific cases where innovative services were introduced and even flourished (for a time), thanks to the dynamism of a committed, energetic librarian and the benign indifference of the library administration. On the other hand, there are undoubtedly some instances where new services were short-lived despite an enthusiastic library administration.

In order to appreciate some of the factors underlying administrative responsiveness (or lack thereof) to emerging services, it is necessary to understand that services and programs are the primary mechanisms by which nonprofit institutions deal with their environments. In other words, services are an essential means by which libraries, for example, cope with or adapt to a rapidly changing, turbulent environment. Indeed, it might be argued that the development of new services keyed to perceived environmental needs is directly related to organizational survival. The same conclusion would apply to profit-making organizations. However, in these instances, the development and marketing of new products are frequently predictive of organizational growth.

The interrelationship of service utility and organizational environment is much more complicated than it would at first appear. A large part of the complexity lies in the fact that organizations exist in multiple
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environments — social, political, economic, cultural and technological — which would be difficult to define and analyze even if they were static (which they aren’t). In fact, there are a number of studies which suggest that organizational environments are becoming increasingly complex, diverse and unpredictable. One writer has suggested that the environment surrounding higher education is highly "turbulent, tumultuous, chaotic; a blooming, buzzing confusion that often seems unmanageable." Yet all living things, even organizations, must adapt to their environments, even when these environments are overwhelmingly imprecise and difficult to define.

At any given point in time there are a number of new services which might be offered. The task of the administrator is to support those which best "fit" the environment at that time. Performance of this task is perhaps the key test of successful administration because it encompasses all the traditional functions of the administrator, from POSDCORB on. Yet the person responsible for performing is extremely vulnerable, because of the task’s innate complexity and because it is so palpably difficult to measure the effectiveness of a given service. Finally, there is a philosophical difficulty implied, because the task asks the administrator to accept the fact that institutional effectiveness depends far less on allegiance to traditional goals of library service than on pragmatic programs which are contingent upon environmental realities. As Lowell Martin stated in the preface to his survey of the Chicago Public Library: "The urban condition calls for something more than 'business as usual'. . . . A program of service is presented that calls for the . . . Library to adjust to the people of the city in all their diversity. . . . to the multifarious interests of a society."

As libraries have attempted to respond to their changing environments, they have usually diversified and differentiated their structures and functions. Differentiation in this context includes changes in staff attitudes and behavior, not just the simple fact of organizational segmentation and specialized knowledge. The decentralization of decision-making loci (in response to demands for participation by both staff and users), the trend toward increased staff specialization and departmentalization, and the significant impact of new technologies on organizational work systems are but a few examples of the centrifugal forces affecting library organizations.

Several studies have found that the differentiation of organizational units, when based upon task analysis and environmental conditions, has contributed to improved performance. There is a very real risk, however,
that an overemphasis on specialization (differentiation) can lead to organizational conflict and systemwide failure to achieve organizational goals. The problem of coordinating specialized subunits is amplified when such groups grow in importance, and when their members experience internal conflict between identification with the group and with the larger organization. In other words, specialized knowledge or function typically calls for greater autonomy and discretion. The administrators' task in this instance is to maintain a balance between the organization's need for differentiation (to cope with its environment) and its need for integration (to achieve its purpose or goals).

In many libraries, one of the most overworked mechanisms for preventing organizational fragmentation is the committee. Committees are frequently composed of a cross section of the diverse interests present in most libraries. To the extent that this mechanism facilitates interdepartmental communication and fosters joint effort to achieve goals, it contributes to organizational integration and unity. This function of the committee is significant, because the coordination of effort is an inseparable corollary to the division of labor. Coordination means here the continual adjustment of the various parts of the organization to each other so that all operations, procedures and activities make maximum contribution to the entire organization. According to Metcalf, "Coordination rather than supervision and direct management is...the great task of the librarian."

Early management theorists recognized the importance of coordination and emphasized rules, procedures and the organizational hierarchy as means of achieving it. This emphasis was prompted in part by the predictable nature of the tasks which early organizations sought to accomplish, and the relative stability of the environment or situation. This approach has been described as "coordination by plan," whereby intra-organizational linkages are established through standardization, schedules, procedures and policies. In other words, organizational integration is attained through preestablished programs which specify what activities are to be performed and when.

In more transitive situations, on the other hand, where the environment is turbulent rather than placid and where much decision-making is nonroutine, coordination through feedback may be more appropriate. To the extent that contingencies arise, coordination requires the communication of information (feedback) concerning deviation from anticipated conditions, and the mutual adjustment of affected units or departments.
In practice, most organizations use a mixture of the two types of coordination; both approaches appear to be necessary for the articulation of organizational units into a coherent whole. However, as organizations become more diversified, specialized and differentiated, they will have to rely less on a system of programmed or planned interactions to achieve the necessary linkages among units, and more on a system of reciprocal information flow. Coordination is necessary, then, not only to provide a 2-way flow of technical information, but also to develop mutual trust and confidence between the members of units which are required to collaborate.

In addition to using the interdepartmental committee as an integrative device, library systems have attempted to increase the volume of feedback and horizontal communication through the appointment of coordinators. Many libraries have such positions—for example, coordinator of library instruction, of special collections, of branch libraries, of minority services, of public services, of technical services, etc.—and the individuals holding these positions function as both line and staff officers in many cases. The growth of these types of positions is obviously a function of organizational size, but it is also related to the greater autonomy and specialization of operating units and departments, and is directly related to rapidly changing technologies and emerging services. Dyson, in a survey of twenty-four undergraduate libraries, found that almost half of the library instruction programs are administered by coordinators, and ten of eleven coordinators have been assigned their responsibilities within the past five years.

Another example of integrative effort is the employment of coordinators in library systems and networks composed of independent libraries. Individuals holding these positions frequently have only a staff relationship to network members, yet often are responsible for the difficult task of achieving a measure of standardization and cooperation among the participating libraries.

The complexity of the task of achieving organizational integration on one hand, and the coordinator's frequent lack of commensurate authority and role definition on the other, have resulted in feelings of frustration, ineffectiveness and positional anxiety. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that in the past the term "coordinator" has too often conjured up images of a passive, responsive individual who transmitted information back and forth between more powerful managers. However, coordinators increasingly will need to have influence in decision-making; they will need to be leaders who have the interpersonal skills to achieve
resolution of difficult conflicts and become the integrators within the organization.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, it appears that in some situations, the success or failure of a new service very heavily rests on the responsible coordinator.

The effective library administrator needs to be cognizant of the environmental forces which affect all "open systems," one of which is the library. But as libraries segment themselves in an attempt to be more responsive to change, attention must also be given to the design of coordinative devices to maintain organizational integrity. According to Lawrence and Lorsch, "the viable organizations [of the future] will be the ones that master the science and art of organization design to achieve both high differentiation and high integration."\textsuperscript{16}

**CHANGES IN STRUCTURE**

The process of adaptation described earlier will inevitably produce change in organizational structures. However, it is interesting to note that a recent survey of state library agencies covering the period 1973-78 revealed few such changes.\textsuperscript{17} Correspondence received from large public libraries reveals that modest changes have occurred recently in their organizational structure and that additional changes are anticipated.\textsuperscript{18} In many cases, these changes are a direct result of differentiation in response to changing external environments. Attempts by libraries to provide services to minority groups are typical examples.

In an increasing number of instances, organizational change seems to be more a result of new technologies than anything else. Technology encompasses far more than just hardware or machines. It is defined in this paper as the combination of skills, equipment, facilities, tools and relevant specialized knowledge needed to bring about transformations in materials, information and people.\textsuperscript{19} Under this broad definition, the skills, tools and conceptual knowledge required to provide information and referral services, bibliographic instruction, or computerized data base searching — to name just a few innovations — would constitute new technologies. In other words, the new or emerging services offered by libraries more often than not are based on technological developments.

Technology is a difficult variable to analyze, for while it constitutes part of an organization’s environment, it is simultaneously being assimilated as part of its functions and processes. Perhaps for this reason a number of studies have indicated that technology leads to changes in structure.\textsuperscript{20} However, there is an obvious time lag in this process, and the structures of libraries (at least as they are described in organization
An administrator of a large public library system remarked that technological developments such as the closing of the card catalog will require a great deal of staff development, reassignment and continuing education, but so far none of this has happened. The recommendations of Booz, Allen and Hamilton concerning the organization of Columbia University Libraries are possibly indicative of the degree to which academic libraries are structurally out of step with their environments and technologies. Parenthetically, the rapid pace of organizational change lends some validity to the idea that library organization charts should be written on the backs of old envelopes and frequently discarded.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of the library's traditional structure—the bifurcated, pyramidal design of technical services and public services, and the usual departments within each of these divisions—is that the library user may be at a real disadvantage because the "products" of the technical services division are supposed to be retrieved and interpreted by staff who have had little if anything to do with the procedures which produced them.

There is, of course, no one best structure or design. However, there is a growing body of evidence which suggests that a structure which is open, adaptive and organic would offer more advantages than one which is closed, stable and mechanistic. Indeed, the more sophisticated the technology variable, the greater is the need for flexible, responsive structures. In the closed-structure situation, more autonomy is needed by lower-level personnel, more interactions among various levels and coordinative mechanisms are required, and greater flexibility is called for.

Generally speaking, electronic technology tends to centralize decision-making and fosters standardization. Computer-based management information systems are frequently centralized, and the present costs of these systems and peripheral equipment do not often permit duplication. However, the utilization of skilled analysts and computer scientists suggests at least some consultation on the part of top management, and as the role of these specialists expands, decision-making processes will be decentralized. One respondent from a large public library indicated that in certain high-technology areas, a management team approach is being used.

The task of the administrator in this area is particularly difficult. There has been little conclusive research in librarianship on the relationship between organizational structure and technology, or between structure and environment. Textbooks on library administration typically...
describe traditional patterns or old models. Consequently, questions concerning structural change are not easily answered. Occasionally, decisions on where to locate a new service seem to be based on the personalities and interests of middle managers rather than on organizational analysis. Similarly, it is not unheard of for a library's organizational structure to be significantly reconfigured simply to isolate an ineffective middle manager.

In the academic library, the problem of restructuring the organization is further complicated by the collegiate model of the teaching faculty. In the public library, civil service regulations may inhibit organizational redesign. However, despite the complexity of the matter, all organizations must change, and sooner or later the changes will be reflected in their structures.

PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The emergence of new services holds extraordinary significance for all aspects of personnel management — recruitment, staff development and training, utilization and job design, and performance evaluation. In regard to recruitment, school, public and academic libraries located in urban centers frequently require staff with facility in foreign languages (such as Spanish). All types of libraries often require specialized technical knowledge on the part of employees, from systems analysis or computer science to instructional technology, graduate degrees in certain subject areas, or certain types of experiential background. These requirements are typically rooted in library programs, actual as well as anticipated.

Education and knowledge will probably continue to be the dominant criteria in the job candidate selection process because of their importance to a society dependent on intellectual achievement. The higher academic requirements for many university library positions are but one indication of this trend. The key question for library administrators in this regard is whether the library is merely taking advantage of a labor supply with higher than average educational backgrounds or just keeping up with comparable libraries (e.g., if other libraries require a second master's degree, why shouldn't we?), or whether library jobs have evolved which really do require higher levels of education.

To the extent that new technologies have been introduced into most library organizations, library jobs have changed. One indication of the extent of this change is the fairly widespread interest in formal and informal continuing education programs. Another aspect is the adminis-
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trator's reliance on the technical knowledge of support staff. As Dowlin said in a recent article, "They (administrators) can rely no longer on one set of skills to last a career." As noted earlier, the technical expertise of these staff frequently elicits a greater delegation of responsibility and authority, and possibly a significant voice in library decision-making.

Another impact of technology on organizations is the absorption of routine tasks. For over two decades, libraries have capitalized on various types of hardware and innovations in systems design to improve their housekeeping functions. One writer suggests that public libraries may not have made much progress beyond this point, as there is little evidence that technology has improved their public services. To the extent that new technology has the capacity in many instances to absorb routine, monotonous work, it can contribute to the design of more meaningful jobs. For example, a study by Peter Spyers-Duran found that automated cataloging systems resulted in an increased level of responsibility for clerical and paraprofessional staff, with a higher percentage of books being processed by nonprofessional staff. System Development Corporation's study of computer technology in libraries found that on-line services are having a profound impact on library/information reference service, not only in terms of speed and comprehensiveness of services, but also in the improved self-image and morale of the information professionals involved.

Although library jobs have undergone modification in response to environmental and technological changes, the changing values and expectations of staff have also contributed to the redesign of jobs. Increasingly, jobs are seen not as mere economic activities or adjuncts to the individual's "real" life, but as central to one's psychological and social well-being. This concern with the quality of working life led to the appointment of a government task force to study and report on the matter.

From an administrative point of view, the easiest course of action would be to let the incumbent employee define the job and set its parameters. This approach might well be justified if there were any conclusive evidence that employee job satisfaction results in improved performance and productivity. It also has a certain appeal in that it is worker-centered and emphasizes the human relations school of management — and the employee's need for self-actualization.

Unfortunately for the library manager, the most difficult course of action is probably the correct one. Library jobs should be redesigned to support those processes and services which best relate to the organization's
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environment, to capitalize on existing technology, and at the same time, to attend to the psychosocial needs of employees. The redesign process quite naturally begins with articulation of library goals; a clear statement of goals will frequently lead to a better understanding of which programs or services are likely to achieve them. While jobs are the components which support an organization's programs, specific tasks are the units which make up individual jobs. However, the process is a very difficult one and demands considerable concentration and effort. Furthermore, the administrator cannot help being anxious over the possibility that the library profession truly lacks people "who comprehend the hardware, understand the applications, ... have the requisite design ability to bring the total package together."  

Difficult as these burdens are, the trends toward increased accountability and productivity require that library operations and procedures be analyzed, and that staff be deployed and utilized to its full potential. As one administrator of a large public library remarked to this writer, "New forms have to be developed, new criteria for performance ... and goal-setting by rank and file staff is a new concept but is gaining in acceptance and proficiency all the time." There are two issues involved here: one is the proper allocation of budget monies, the other the proper utilization of personnel resources. With regard to the first, Haas has stated that library administrators have often failed to support service programs at appropriate levels because they do not fully comprehend the entire range of service obligations that libraries really have. "As a result, available dollars have gone where they are most easily (though not always most effectively) spent, that is, to technical service activities."  

With regard to personnel resources, Drucker says that in libraries, as in many other service organizations, the best of one's human resources are misallocated. They are frequently invested in the defense of yesterday's programs rather than in the design of new services in response to changing needs.  

For many librarians, the entire question of emerging services may be rather academic. In this era of taxpayer revolt and the resulting fiscal crises for a number of libraries, retrenchment rather than expansion of services seems to be the catchword. But as Lillian Bradshaw wisely pointed out, the question of administrative support of emerging services is just as important in times of financial cutbacks as in times of financial well-being. According to Bradshaw: "Administrators have the responsibility to continually evaluate the service which they are rendering, being honest about their successes or failures and being ready to propose alternatives.
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Anything less would be failing to respond to the rapidly changing patterns of twentieth century society.\textsuperscript{133}

References

7. See Lawrence, Paul R., and Lorsch, Jay W. \textit{Organization and Environment: Managing Differentiation and Integration}. Boston, Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, 1967, p. 67.
16. Ibid., p. 238.
18. These five libraries were the Dallas Public Library, Detroit Public Library, District of Columbia Public Library, Los Angeles Public Library and Minneapolis Public Library.
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27. Ibid.


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