Introduction

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To read these articles is to hear loudly once again the chirring, swirling condition of librarianship of the past fifteen years, during which empires rose and fell, crowns blew off like leaves in the wind, and cities on the darkling plain were taken by ignorant armies that clashed by night. We are to a very great extent faced today with the repair of damage left by the period 1968-75 in librarianship. We have met the enemy, and he is us.

At the same time, an extensive array of outside forces has intruded on library affairs to drain our energy and resources by making everything harder to do than it ever should be in any rational world. The expanding nature of these forces is described in full in this group of articles on library consulting. They make clear that we are largely caught up in processes to the detriment of purpose in librarianship, that we are suffering badly from confusions of the multiplicity that so besets our times.

In considering the infinite complexity of librarianship, and the range of conflicting forces that whipsaw us, it is proper to remind ourselves of Forrester’s Law, which should be much better known than it is—that in complicated situations efforts to improve things often tend to make them worse, sometimes much worse, on occasions calamitous, because the obvious thing to do is often dead wrong. The conditions described by these articles are beginning to put a very high premium on searching for and using to the fullest a wide range of highly specialized

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consulting talents in order to embrace comprehensively the factors that bear on decisions and make those decisions as sensitively accurate and as long-term as possible. These articles discuss when to use consultants, how to identify those who can really help, and how to use them effectively. They also present a range of the situations in the specialty they discuss that are repeatedly confronted in libraries, and how they can be dealt with.

Webster and Lorenz write the most informed and comprehensive treatment to date on how consultants can be put to effective use. They end by endorsing formal training as consultants, and describe the beginnings of such training. We are reminded, regrettably, of that time which called for formal training as schoolteachers, and of the wreckage that surrounds us in a profession so overwhelmed by methodology that talent has been forgotten.

Hayes writes a pioneering article about the involvement of consultants in library computerization, an area strewn with more wreckage than the rocky cliffs of Cape Horn. With his guidance it really is no longer necessary to blow ourselves up with our own ammunition, although I feel sure that some librarians will still feel compelled to do so.

Byam persuasively attaches staff development to organizational conditions which encourage personal effort and reaching out, the only processes by which anyone can grow. This emphasis is especially important for our times, in which we tend to conceive of staff development as a kind of miracle that descends from above, or an easy process that comes from mini-miracles like one-day conferences, workshops or anything else not connected with the work process.

Henderson recapitulates the history that has led to our present state of unionization in library staffs, delineates the strange problems that descend on newly organized staffs, and describes new processes that enter the management scene and where expertise can be found to help manage them.

Ash's article on collection building relates to the area of library performance that in my opinion has declined the most since the early 1960s, during which good libraries had generated the best of all possible interactions between the library-minded faculty and the faculty-minded librarians for the purpose of selecting the books most needed. The descent of the shower of gold sent the faculty their own merry way, confident that the library could buy everything, exactly at the time when acquisitions staffs were unable to spend the money allotted to them at all, let alone wisely. The substitution of random systems has left us in a
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condition where, as I have observed elsewhere, the Ouija board probably would do us as well. I have no doubt that the painstaking personal review of collections which Ash describes the consultant performing must return to the scene.

Downs describes from a depth of more than forty years of consulting the broad-guaged actions of the past that laid the basis for our current achievements. The variety of approaches he describes for analyses of wide-flung geographical areas of librarianship should prove extremely useful for a generation of librarians to which concerns of network applications will be of continuing and increasing importance.

From the top, Dougherty describes the systematic traumas of high-level management that threaten to render obsolete all library directors by the age of forty-five. Has anyone run the tenure-years for directors through the computer recently? His proposal for a continual process of consultation and consultant review of library activities, as an adjunct to review of the potential of the library staff, will probably become standard practice at least in larger libraries.

To read Markuson’s article is “to see the world in a grain of sand,” in William Blake’s phrase, as the range of library complexities are compressed within the confines of a network headquarters office. Hers is the first article written on network consulting, and the wide range of problems on which consulting is frequently demanded, which far exceeds that of individual libraries, presents an unusual view of the operations of networks.

At the same time that the demand for consultants escalates sharply, the pressures increase on the consultants themselves to expand their expertise, as demonstrated in my article on library building consultation. The article suggests the number of different areas into which the consultant must expand to be used with maximal effect in planning buildings.

Taken together, these articles should give a much clearer view of the growing importance of consulting in libraries, of how it is likely to affect us all in the future, and of how we can maximize its effect.