
Afterword

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WHEN THE EDITOR of this issue, Janice Kirkland, asked me to write a kind of postscript to the papers, I had only a vague idea of their scope. The title "human response to library automation" can be interpreted in several different ways. For example, it could refer to the perspective of the librarian or to that of the user of libraries. It could refer to response to *projected* automation, or to response to automation already in place. Finally, it could refer to attitudes toward library automation or to the effect of automation on organizational and individual behavior.

In fact, all of these aspects are touched upon at some point in this volume, and it is encouraging to see that the views of the library user are finally being taken into account. For many years it seemed that automation was looked upon solely as a convenience for the librarian and that too little attention was paid to its effects on the services provided.

If these papers fully reflect the present situation, and I am inclined to believe that they do, they suggest that rather little work has been done to study human response to automation *in the library setting*, and much of what has been done is more anecdotal than scientific or is based on surveys with very small numbers of respondents.

It is, of course, very difficult to study human response to library automation per se, controlling all the other variables. When studying use of, or reactions to, an online public access catalog, is one really looking at the *automated* catalog or merely at the catalog? Ideally one would like to study use of the card catalog in a particular institution and, at a later time, that of its online replacement, using comparable methodologies and populations of users. Unfortunately, such "before and after" studies have rarely been attempted.

Many of our conclusions on the effects of automation in libraries, then, while they may be entirely plausible, can hardly be considered scientifically proven. To take but one example, it is claimed that automation blurs the distinction between technical services and public services and brings into contact with library users more staff members who were previously behind the scenes. It is by no means clear that this trend is a result of automation or is merely due to a realization, long overdue, that behind-the-scenes staff may be more highly motivated and do a better job if they actually get to meet the people they eventually serve.

Another danger that exists is to assume that findings in other settings, such as large profit-making corporations, on the effects of automation can be transferred to the library arena. For example, has automation in itself brought about more participative management in libraries? I doubt it. One can readily see that computer conferencing and electronic mail, by allowing more rapid inputs to the decision-making process to be made by more people, may well promote participative management in a large corporation, particularly one having many branches that are geographically dispersed. It is much more difficult to see how automation promotes participative management in libraries, especially the smaller ones. This is not to deny that some level of democratization in management has occurred in libraries but merely to caution that this trend, while it has accompanied automation activities, is not ipso facto the result of automation.

This issue of *Library Trends* is stimulating and provides much food for thought. However, it does suggest that "human response" has not been uppermost in the minds of many of those engaged in library automation and that this aspect of automation deserves more of our attention in the future.