
Getting Comfortable with Change: A New Budget Model for Libraries in Transition

JERRY D. CAMPBELL

ABSTRACT

THE PRESENT BUDGET MODEL for libraries is not serving libraries well during this time of transition to an increasingly electronic knowledge environment. The existing model inhibits organizational flexibility and exacerbates the staff's sense that they are losing control of their own professional destinies. A new transitional budget model is recommended. The transitional model emphasizes staff education, organizational flexibility, and experimentation. Its goal is to make libraries adept at and comfortable with change.

INTRODUCTION

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. (Yeats, 1952, p. 489)

This article will describe a new budget model for libraries. What follows, however, is not just a budget, for a budget is the expression of some organizational reality. This discussion will be an effort to propose both an organization and the budget that flows from, and sustains, it.

At the outset of writing this article, this author was wary of some large pitfalls surrounding the idea of creating a new budget model for libraries. When the present model began to emerge about a century ago, the process for the distribution of knowledge by means of print-on-paper was established and understood. Today, however, the future of the distribution of knowledge is unresolved. The trend

Jerry D. Campbell, Duke University Library, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708-0181

LIBRARY TRENDS, Vol. 42, No. 3, Winter 1994, pp. 448-59

© 1994 The Board of Trustees, University of Illinois

is toward electronic distribution but certain aspects remain to be settled including setting standards and solving copyright/licensing problems. Meanwhile, print-on-paper appears to be unconcerned about its new competition as large numbers of books and journals continue to be produced. The dimensions of the new information environment, therefore, are not yet clear, and proposing a model for the library of the future still requires a great deal of guesswork. In other words, it is too soon to present a full-blown new model of library organization and finances.

Another pitfall concerned the stakes of the game. Talk of new models and new paradigms is easy. It pervades our generation. It is intellectually stimulating and exciting to contemplate radically new ways of approaching our work, especially if there is little or no likelihood that these contemplations will actually have an impact on our libraries. But suggesting a new financial model that might be taken seriously seemed a different matter. This author could just as easily—perhaps more easily—construct a flawed model that would, if taken seriously, unleash a calamity upon the library world.

To be sure, libraries are not prone to respond quickly to any stimulus, so it was decided that risk of calamity was modest. In addition, it was decided that tweaking a budget here and there does not constitute a paradigm change, and most of our efforts at new models fall within the parameters of tweaking. It is not certain where the dividing line falls between merely adjusting one paradigm and actually introducing another. Allocating more money to collections and less to staff does not constitute a paradigm shift. Selling the library to a commercial agency and buying back library services does constitute such a shift. Whether the model suggested later constitutes a paradigm shift is doubtful. But it is certain that it requires fundamental shifts in our priorities and in our approach to librarianship, and such shifts are needed today.

As an academic librarian, my efforts here may inadvertently be more directly applicable to academic libraries than to others. Some of the themes that appear are common to all libraries, and it is hoped that the model will be of interest beyond the academic library community.

WHY A NEW MODEL

Pitfalls notwithstanding, the invitation to propose a new budget model was accepted because this author is convinced that such a model is a necessity if libraries are to thrive in these last years of the twentieth century. This necessity arises from an inter-related set of circumstances familiar to every librarian. The most prominent of these is the paradoxically terrible and wonderful assault of computer technology

on the information world (for the best recent and comprehensive assessment of technology and libraries, see Cummings, et al., 1992). Everywhere within libraries appears the signs of this ongoing assault. From public access catalogs to paperless cataloging, little remains unaffected. The signs of computer technology also saturate our professional world, pervading the programs of our professional associations as well as the library literature. It is simply clear that libraries and librarians are undergoing a transformation. The degree to which they will eventually be changed is often debated, but the fact that they are in the process of transformation is beyond question.

While the positive implications of this technological transformation for the dissemination of knowledge are truly monumental, to libraries under financial duress the costs appear monumental as well. In the first generation of library automation, libraries were generally successful at finding incremental support for the cost of technology, including new staffing capabilities. Now, however, as the technological remaking of libraries proceeds, it is increasingly difficult to secure new support. Thus the costs of new technology compete with existing budgetary obligations, requiring the reallocation of funds. Such reallocation within most library budgets is a difficult process that often damages the morale of staff and reduces services to users.

The challenge of incorporating computer technology into libraries and reallocating dollars to pay for it is exacerbated by a second circumstance—the inflexibility of existing library organizational structures. Our present organizational structures evolved from, and are adapted to, the requirements of a print-on-paper environment. Not surprisingly, as librarianship became increasingly professionalized and marked by specialization, the internal boundaries that characterized our organizations became more rigid. Often we quarreled among ourselves, artificially creating great gulfs between the interests of public and technical services. It became difficult and remains difficult to overcome or cross these internal boundaries. Such inflexibility is not conducive to rapid adaptation of new technologies but instead fosters the continuation of old methods and procedures. In a time of rapid change, the organizational model, therefore, fails in its role of facilitating efforts to keep pace.¹

The problem with such inflexibility is magnified because electronic information does not conform to the parameters and requirements of the print-on-paper environment. Indeed, it ignores and crosses these long-standing boundaries as if they were not there. Networked databases, for instance, do not remain in the confines of any department nor do they respect our specializations. Thus, being organized to manage paper, it is often found to be difficult

or impossible to respond to technological opportunities gracefully. This is a serious deficiency during an age in which technological change is constant, pervasive, and rapid and in which we are confronted with laying the foundations for the library of the twenty-first century. It is the worst of times for us to allow old models to hamper creativity and responsiveness.

The technological assault combines with this organizational rigidity to produce one additional circumstance that necessitates changing the model, namely, an unproductive anxiety. On the one hand, change seems inevitable. Technology is a large train, and libraries are stalled on its track. Something has to give. On the other hand, change within libraries seems impossible. Given the trauma associated with major changes in libraries, few librarians, including library administrators, have the necessary courage to risk it. To do so is to invite a barrage of criticism and defensiveness. At its worst, the result can be a frustrating environment where the timid are threatened and the bold are held back, where conflict is incubated, and self interest is encouraged. In such an environment, individual librarians may feel that their professional destiny is out of control and that, ironically, none of the structures either within libraries or professional associations can do anything to help. This anxiety-induced inertia is particularly lamentable because, as a group, librarians are easily capable of meeting the technology challenge that distinguishes this time of transition.

DESCRIBING A TRANSITIONAL LIBRARY MODEL

What is called for in these circumstances is a budget model designed to accommodate libraries in transition. Since it is too soon to propose a model for the library of the future, perhaps we can establish a model that is particularly helpful during a period of change, a transitional library model (TLM). Such a model does not have to possess a timeless quality but rather must be designed for flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness to opportunity. The goals of such a TLM include the following:

- providing sufficient continuity for ongoing print-on-paper functions while recognizing and accommodating the requirements of the emerging electronic information environment,
- achieving organizational stability without developing structural rigidity,
- underwriting a new working environment for the library staff and providing for perpetual upgrading of their skills,
- restoring the reality of and sense of control and self-value to librarians.

To achieve these goals, the TLM would have to reorganize priorities and place emphasis on some new features.

Emphasis on Education and Training

The existing model for continuing education and training (E&T) for those who work in libraries has largely featured learning opportunities outside the library connected with professional and membership organizations. While this model has provided many benefits to the profession, it has focused almost solely upon professional librarians and provided little uniformity or continuity within individual libraries. In addition, it is at best difficult for individual libraries to develop a consistent E&T program using this model.

But consistent and ongoing E&T programs are just what we need for libraries in transition. The need for keeping technologically current is perhaps the most visible challenge but is by no means the only one. Almost every other new priority outlined later carries with it an E&T requirement. And these E&T challenges can no longer be focused primarily on professional librarians. Support staff-level personnel are valuable and vital partners in creating the library of the future. Their skill levels, too, must keep pace with the demands of a changing environment if they are to serve the library well in this time of change.

In the transitional library model, each library should provide the opportunity for every staff member to receive education and training annually. While some common themes will characterize such E&T programs, they should, to the degree possible, be customized to the individual library in order to match and support its vision, goals, and objectives. Except for very small libraries, efforts to establish regular ongoing E&T programs should take the form of in-house training using a faculty of both internal experts and external consultants. In a short time, such an E&T program will reap manifold benefits since a work force aware of trends and which is up to date on skills will be more capable and confident in meeting the challenges of the changing environment.

A new emphasis on education and training will not be inexpensive. Some businesses spend hundreds—some thousands—of dollars per staff member each year and require as much as two weeks of E&T annually for each individual on training (see article in Filipczak, 1992, p. 55). They would not long continue to do so, of course, unless the benefits were sufficiently valuable to justify it. Fiscal realities may prohibit libraries from jumping rapidly to a program of such magnitude, but it is urgent that they begin. Counting the value of staff time spent in the E&T program, the transitional

library model proposes that at least 2 percent of the existing salary budget be allocated to E&T.

Emphasis on New Service Opportunities

Since the existing library model is focused on carrying out well-known and well-defined operations, it is usually no one's specific responsibility to pay attention to new service opportunities or to inquire after new means, methods, and technologies. The result is that libraries as often discover new possibilities accidentally as they do through consistent ongoing efforts. In addition, most libraries also find it difficult, both financially and structurally, to take advantage of new discoveries quickly even when their value is compelling. In this regard, libraries typically submit the best ideas for innovation to federal, state, or private funding agencies and wait for them to complete the relatively slow funding cycles. Only then, usually a year later, do those hot new ideas receive attention.

The transitional library model proposes that a spirit of investigation and experimentation be fostered in libraries and embodied in their budgets. In industry, this would be equivalent to establishing a research and development capacity. Because technology is sufficiently mature, however, for libraries it is more likely a matter of finding and applying existing technologies than developing new ones. The manner in which this spirit of investigation and experimentation is embodied in libraries may vary, but this author favors dispersing it throughout the library leadership. Library leadership is anyone who leads any size unit in the library. It is important that all individuals with leadership responsibilities be made accountable for investigation and experimentation within their spheres of responsibility. In addition, it is essential that some operating budget resources be allocated to support their efforts. While support for experimentation will continue to be a major focus for fund-raising, it is too important not to receive some small level of funding from the operating budget. For this important period of change when so many new opportunities rapidly appear and just as rapidly disappear, the TLM proposes that a minimum of 3 percent of the operating budget (inclusive of salaries and capital expenditures) be devoted to this library version of research and development.

Emphasis On User Responsiveness

Perhaps because both librarians and library users were bound to certain limitations surrounding the use of books and journals, our interaction and attention to the interests and needs of users have been attenuated. As the new knowledge environment emerges, however, there is an opportunity to design a system that accords much better with the desires of users. This opportunity exists primarily

because information in electronic form offers many more options for distribution and access than do books and journals. With this new medium of recorded knowledge, we are no longer tied to the limits of location and physical handling that were foundations of the paper-centered library.

The argument to put user concerns at the center of creating the new knowledge environment may seem obvious. After all, attention to customers has been one of the key themes of the U.S. business world for the past decade. Whether the source was the quintessentially American management advice of Tom Peters or the system developed by W. Edwards Deming that revolutionized post World War II Japan, we were admonished on every side to recognize the importance of attentiveness and responsiveness to customers. It has not been so obvious within libraries, however, until recently (see Shaughnessy, 1993, p. 9), and libraries have a long way to go before user concerns take precedence over our own opinions as experts.

In order for libraries to emphasize user concerns and satisfaction, the transitional library model proposes that user analysis must become a regular part of what librarians do. Elsewhere this author has suggested that user analysis should become an integral part of the work of reorganized reference departments (see Campbell, 1992), but wherever an individual library may choose to lodge the responsibility, it must be given emphasis during this time of change. Fortunately, its cost will be modest compared to its benefits. User analysis requires a small level of ongoing support for communication with users through studies, surveys, and focus groups. Staffing costs can, for the most part, be built into existing staff time, though some consulting may be required initially. The total costs for user analysis may be as little as two tenths of 1 percent of the operating budget.

Emphasis On Teamwork

A library in transition must find a way to escape the rigidity and inflexibility of the divisions within the existing library model. The transitional library model proposes that the best way to accomplish this is to redesign the library on the basis of a team approach. There are several reasons that the team approach is a preferable alternative for libraries. First, it may offer the most gentle means of initiating organizational change. If desirable, an initial configuration of teams may be fashioned from existing units, departments, and branches. For libraries that are more advanced in organizational skills, less traditional and more forward looking teams may be established. In any case, evolving a library into a team-based operation can be tailored to the style and organizational prowess of

each individual library, thus reducing staff resistance and organizational shock. More than any other organizational principle, teams provide for stability without rigidity.

The second reason for preferring a team-based arrangement is that it diminishes the perception of boundaries and divisions and allows the library to adjust rapidly to new challenges. It achieves this, in part, by reducing the management layers of the organization. This often eliminates entire layers of managers who, for career reasons, must be concerned about protecting their "territories." As a result, it becomes easier to establish new teams that reach across old boundaries. Such teams are often called cross-functional teams. The easy ability to form and reform teams is a distinct organizational advantage in a time when a host of new problems and opportunities arise that do not fit existing organizational units.

A third reason that a team-based approach is preferable is that teamwork can result in higher productivity, better quality, and greater staff morale. It does so through better use of the talents of individuals and through better synergism within the workplace through the reduction of individual isolation (Rees, 1991, p. 37). It also provides these benefits because it allows and encourages everyone to take responsibility for the success of the operation (see Stayer, 1990). The team approach empowers individual staff members at all levels to contribute to the destiny of the organization as never before, and in so doing, reduces the number of those who come and go like zombies without interest, joy, or enthusiasm for the work. Thus the team environment offers a means to put an end to the anxiety-induced inertia referred to earlier by restoring to librarians and support staff alike the ability to get directly involved in working out their professional destinies.

The costs of developing a team environment are limited to the price of education and training and the effort necessary to make the mental conversion from the vertically authoritarian workplace to the team environment. Most of us have known nothing other than the authoritarian environment, so the conversion will require patience, education, and practice.² Since the recommendation for funding in the above section on E&T includes the cost of team training, the good news is that moving to a team environment places no additional drain on the budget.

Emphasis On Fiscal Empowerment

If empowering the library staff through redesigning libraries into team-based organizations is to be most effective, then the teams must also be empowered to manage their own budgets. While there are examples of libraries that practice some degree of decentralized budget

management, the predominant model is for library administrators to retain fiscal control. Our present environment, therefore, is vertically authoritarian both in terms of decision making and in determining the use of financial resources. The result is an organizational climate that militates against budgetary change even for good reasons. When administrators propose financial change, there is little or no ownership of, or support for, the proposal by the staff. Indeed, staff are typically uninformed about the budget and threatened by suggestions for change. At the same time, when staff wish to recommend a change, there is little likelihood that they will understand the budget process well enough to make their case persuasively or have it taken seriously. The result is that most library budgets remain virtually unchanged from year to year. Thus, it is not sufficient to empower staff through redesigning libraries into team-based organizations; they must also be given financial empowerment in the team context.

The transitional library model, therefore, proposes that the library's budget be allocated to the teams as appropriate, and that the teams be granted both the responsibility and authority to determine and manage the expenditure of the funds. This will allow teams to make and implement choices to cope with a changing environment. If new challenges lie beyond the financial resources of individual teams, as they often will, teams may choose to pool resources in ways never imaginable within the present model. They may also choose to create new teams, staffing and funding them with human and financial resources reallocated from existing teams.

Emphasis On More Effective Management Systems

Paying both for maintaining key traditional library functions and for beginning new functions is a large order. Indeed, just paying for ongoing traditional functions is often impossible in the current financial climate. So achieving a financial environment that can to some degree do both seems more like magic than modeling. Yet it can be done if the new model provides the necessary means and incentives to help library staffs stretch library financial resources further than ever before. What is required is a financial commitment to developing new ways of doing library business, and these new ways must create much greater efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Incorporating the new emphases described earlier also requires new ways of doing business. Signs of these new ways are already appearing in some libraries. One such sign is the movement of some libraries toward management techniques usually identified as Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM is a complex system that comes in several varieties but at its core is an effort to base decision making on hard data, to improve quality continuously, to place user concerns

at the center of things, and to create a team-working environment. Adopting a comprehensive organizational strategy such as TQM offers the advantage and convenience of providing a single system that can incorporate the emphases of this transitional library model. But whether libraries adopt an existing system or develop one of their own, tight budgets in this time of new opportunities make it imperative that libraries change old management habits.

THE TRANSITIONAL LIBRARY BUDGET

It would be helpful if libraries would discontinue comparing budgetary ratios and statistics for awhile. Like the rigidity of our present organizational model, comparative statistics help hold our budgets in an unfortunate stasis. Since quality is typically measured and claimed on the basis of such comparisons, it is difficult, if not dangerous, to abandon competitive, comparative statistics as the justification for setting and defending library budgets. In practice, statistical standings are far more important in our current budgeting practices than is user satisfaction. If we could discontinue keeping the comparative statistics and allow libraries to construct budgets for better reasons, perhaps we would see positive and exciting results.

For this reason, the transitional library budget should have as few standard ratios as possible. It should, rather, encourage libraries to make whatever creative changes are necessary to serve their users with the best services, resources, and technologies possible. Its goal is to facilitate the search for the twenty-first century library. The heart of the transitional library budget, therefore, is its lack of prescriptions for "appropriate" levels of expenditures for any of the major budget areas.

In the foregoing description of the emphases of the transitional library model (TLM), it has been suggested: for education and training, 2 percent of the salary budget should be allocated; for new service opportunities, 3 percent of the operating budget; for user responsiveness, 2 tenths of 1 percent of the operating budget; for teamwork, only the education and training costs; for fiscal empowerment, no additional costs; and for more effective management systems, only the E&T costs. These are the only prescribed costs contained in the TLM. This model proposes, therefore, to transform libraries into flexible organizations adept at coping with change for an annual investment of less than 5 percent of their operating budgets.

There will, of course, be other costs each year, but the transitional library model resists projecting them. Indeed, if the model serves its purpose, the internal budget ratios among salaries, collections, access, computer technologies, and other expenditures, will change proportions each year. If teams, for instance, are empowered to choose

between filling vacancies or converting salary dollars to technology support, they will make the necessary choices, and changes will begin to take place.

It is the premise of this transitional library model that the changes which will take place among the major budget ratios in the next few years will favor a reduction in expenditures for personnel and a corresponding increase in expenditures for technology, a reduction in expenditures for print-on-paper, and a corresponding increase in expenditures for the electronic distribution of information. The TLM, however, does not attempt to prescribe movement in these directions. Rather, it seeks to establish an environment in which libraries will have the organizational and budgetary flexibility to rearrange their internal finances as necessary to best serve their users during this generation of change.

CONCLUSION

It is my hope that the organizational emphases of the transitional library model and the approach to budgeting that supports it will provide libraries with the means to prosper under the technology assault and to develop the ability to adapt to change easily. It is also hoped that consistent programs of continuing education and training combined with empowerment through the team-based approach will improve the sense of confidence and control among library staffs. Perhaps libraries that adopt the TLM will cease to look like mirror images of one another and, instead, take new shapes that uniquely serve the differing needs of their users. And perhaps in an environment where differences are permissible and experimentation is common, some library will find the perfect budgetary ratios for the library of the future. Until that time, a transitional library model will serve us well.

NOTES

- ¹ This failure of the current hierarchical library model is not a condition unique in libraries. It is something that is characteristic of many organizations in our time. See chapter 4 in Davis and Davidson, 1991, pp. 111-143.
- ² This is not unique to libraries. Peters (1992) notes that most of the world's business is conducted by "vertically oriented, staff-driven, thick-headquarters corporate structures" (p. 13).

REFERENCES

- Campbell, J. D. (1992). Shaking the conceptual foundations of reference: A perspective. *Reference Services Review*, 20(4), 29-35.
- Cummings, A. M.; Witte, M. L.; Bowen, W. G.; Lazarus, L. O.; & Ekman, R. H. (1992). *University libraries and scholarly communication: A study prepared for the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation*. Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries.

- Davis, S., & Davidson, B. (1991). *2020 vision*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Filipczak, B. (1992). What employers teach. *Training*, 29(October), 43-55.
- Peters, T. (1992). *Liberation management: Necessary disorganization for the nanosecond nineties*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Rees, F. (1991). *How to lead work teams: Facilitation skills*. San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer & Company.
- Shaughnessy, T. W. (1993). Benchmarking, total quality management, and libraries. *Library Administration & Management*, 7(1), 7-12.
- Stayer, R. (1990). How I learned to let my workers lead. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(6), 66-69, 72, 74, 76, 80, 82-83.
- Yeats, W. B. (1952). The second coming. In O. Williams (Ed.), *Immortal poems of the English language* (p. 489). New York: Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster.