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## Professionalism and the Future of Librarianship\*

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THE GREAT ARGENTINIAN WRITER JORGE LUIS BORGES (1964) wrote a story called "The Library of Babel" describing a magnificent, endless library:

[I]ts shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols. . . . In other words, all that it is given to express, in all languages. Everything: the minutely detailed history of the future, the archangels' autobiographies, the faithful catalogue of the library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of those catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of the true catalogue, the Gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary on that gospel, the commentary on the commentary on that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book in all languages, the interpolations of every book in all books. (p. 54)

This strange stew of information and disinformation bewitches Borges's (1964) librarians. Although each librarian was supposedly in charge of a few of the great library's hexagonal rooms, many reacted to the discovery that the library contained all possible books by rushing off to find those special works that would vindicate their personal actions. "These pilgrims," he says, "disputed in the narrow corridors, proffered dark curses, strangled each other on the divine stairways, flung the deceptive books into the air shafts. . ." (p. 55). Others became official searchers. "I have seen them," he says, "in the performance of their function: they always arrive extremely tired from their journeys; they speak of a broken stairway that almost killed

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them. . . sometimes they pick up the nearest volume and leaf through it, looking for infamous words. Obviously no one expects to discover anything" (p. 55). Still others realized that, in Borges's (1964) words, "on some shelf in some hexagon. . . there must exist a book which is the formula and compendium *of all the rest*: some librarian has gone through it and he is analogous to a god" (p. 56).

Borges's parable serves well as a text for librarianship today, for it is indeed perpetually perched between order and disorder, between information and disinformation, between poverty and surfeit. The vastness of our current information possibilities has many librarians madly pursuing the technologies of data. Others have learned to their detriment the price of panaceas. Still others quietly dream of the librarian somewhere who understands it all.

The sociology of professions has yet to catch up with the wildly dynamic world of contemporary librarianship. If one reads the analyses of librarians written by sociologists, most of them focus on the venerable (and, as shall be shown, meaningless) question of whether librarianship really is a profession. Textbook sociology calls librarianship a semi-profession. The textbooks define a full profession as an organized body of experts who apply some particular form of esoteric knowledge to particular cases. Full professions have systems of instruction and training together with entry by examination and other formal prerequisites. They are believed to possess and enforce some kind of code of ethics or rules of behavior. They are also thought to rely on fees for services, fees which are due whether the result is success or failure. Full professionals in this sense are usually independent, freestanding practitioners. Obviously the models for this conception are law and medicine. Or rather, *were* law and medicine, for this image—fee for service, internally enforced codes, independent practice—is fast disappearing from law and medicine today.

In this textbook view, semi-professions differ from the full professions in that their members are bureaucratically employed, often lack lifetime careers, and do not use, in the eyes of certain sociologists at least, knowledge as esoteric as that of law or medicine. The major semi-professions are social work, teaching, nursing, and librarianship. As the examples make clear, the conceptual difference between profession and semi-profession probably has more to do with the difference between men and women than with anything else.

The sociologists who divided full professions and semi-professions were not persuaded that the dichotomy would last forever. According to the theory of professionalization, semi-professions had only to wait. Professionalization was as inevitable as an escalator. First there came a school, then an association, then examinations, then licensing, then an ethics code, and suddenly the occupation had arrived at its destination—a full profession, just like the lawyers and doctors. Even today, every time

people use the word "professionalization," the image they have in mind is an escalator steadily bearing themselves and their occupations toward a higher status. When they arrive, the would-be professionals think people will respect them and their judgment.

But the escalator on which librarians are perched has somehow never arrived. After a century, librarianship seems no nearer to its goal than in the Dewey days. There is a simple reason for that. There is no escalator. The professions all exist on one level. To be sure, occupations often create examinations, licensing, associations, and ethics codes. But all the licensing in the world does not protect an occupation when new knowledge transforms the nature of its work, when other occupations take parts of its work away, when the capital requirements of its work gradually force it to be organized in different ways. What really matters about an occupation—librarianship or any other—is its relation to the work that it does. When we focus on "professionalization," we take that work for granted as if achieving the structural shape of a "real" profession would somehow stop the history of work in its tracks. But one has only to think of medicine today to see at once that even this most professional of professions looks a great deal different today than it did thirty or forty years ago. In the United States, most doctors are now salaried workers in bureaucracies. Their fees are set by insurance companies and governments. They are disciplined more by malpractice lawyers than by their own disciplinary boards. They still make a lot of money—if that is one's indicator of professionhood—but that too will change soon.

To think about the future of librarianship, then, is not to dream about riding up an escalator to the structural trappings of professionhood. Rather, it is to think about the likely evolution of librarians' work and to ask what the consequences of that evolution might be for the occupation. Note, too, that to ask about the future of librarianship in general is by no means to ask about one's own future in particular. The fate of occupations varies so much in social time and space that individual members can have vastly different experiences, even if separated by only a few years or a few miles or a small difference in credentials.

Once we stop thinking about an occupation's structure and start thinking about the work that it does, a number of things become quickly clear. First, professional work changes all the time and in many directions. Sometimes larger social forces create new work for professions, as the rise of industry did for engineering. Sometimes larger social forces destroy old areas of work, as the decline of railroads did for a number of professions. Sometimes professions just seem to move on, as psychiatrists did in the earlier part of this century, leaving the mental hospitals where they began and taking over outpatient work that had previously been done by neurologists.

Not only does professional work change, and change in many direc-

tions, these changes take place within three crucial contexts. One of these I have already mentioned—the context of larger social and cultural forces that sometimes transforms whole areas of professional work as well as the rules of the game by which professions themselves are organized and structured. The second context is the context of other professions. Professional work is usually work contested by other enviroing professions.

In moving out of the hospitals, for example, the psychiatrists shouldered aside the neurologists who had up until then been in some sense “in charge of” what we would now call neurotic people. At the same time—this took place in the first twenty years of this century—psychiatrists also pushed into the criminal justice system, indeed some of them claiming that the whole thing ought to be shut down and turned into a mental health system. So psychiatrists also fought with lawyers, social workers, and the new profession of psychology. Lawyers themselves, of course, were being pushed on other fronts—e.g., by the bankers’ title insurance companies which were taking over the lawyers’ right to guarantee title. But lawyers were themselves also doing a good deal of pushing; it was at this time that lawyers centralized bill collecting from the nonlawyer individuals who had previously done it, taking the work into lawyer-led bureaucratic collection firms. At the same time, lawyers were fighting accountants in the tax court about who really had the right to advise clients about financial aspects of the new income tax laws—a fierce dispute that ended in a draw in the 1920s. But accountants were also fighting with engineers over who was to dominate large manufacturing companies, a battle they would both lose to the up-and-coming field of sales.

Meanwhile, in another part of the interprofessional battleground, the clergy had lost most of their traditional work—church attendance was at its lowest ebb in American history before or since—and were throwing themselves into social welfare issues, where they had helped create the profession of social work, which then, however, turned around and rejected them as amateurs. Clergy even moved into personal welfare issues—the area that came to be called pastoral counseling—where they were fighting not only the psychiatrists, who had just themselves taken the area over from neurologists, but also the social workers, who were getting tired of the endless round of casework and therefore were following the lead of psychiatry toward individual analysis.

The system of professions is thus a world of pushing and shoving, of contests won and lost. The image of “true professionalism” notwithstanding, professions and semi-professions alike are skirmishing over the same work on a more or less level playing field. There is thus no sense in differentiating professions and semi-professions; they are all simply expert occupations finding work to do and doing it when they can.

If the first context of professions is that of larger social and cultural forces, and the second is the context of other competing professions, the

third crucial context is the context of other ways of providing expertise. Expertise resides not only in individuals, as is the pattern with professionalism. Expertise can also reside in things and in organizations.

Many people think locating expertise in things is recent. In fact, it is not. Forms for performing legal work—thereby circumventing lawyers—go back many centuries. Counting and calculating machines have replaced human workers since the late nineteenth century. Published algorithms for calculating compound interest, engineering formulas, and statistics have likewise contained human expertise for generations. Commodity expertise has often, however, been under the control of the relevant human experts. Librarians' control of the vast panoply of reference tools is a clear example. But so too is the lawyers' control of their own massive citation system. Moreover, commodity expertise has tended to affect only the lowest levels of expertise, the most routine, the most uninteresting. And commodities are incapable of reproducing or changing themselves, things experts themselves do with little difficulty. Thus, commodity expertise, although old, has not really been a major threat to the professions heretofore.

The other great competitor of expertise in people is expertise in organizations. Expertise built into organizations is basically a phenomenon of this century. The hospital with its complex division of labor, the large law firm, the large accounting firm, the multidisciplinary architectural houses—these were all invented in the early years of this century. They have steadily increased in size and in coverage of the realm of expert work in the years since.

Organizations present a more substantial threat to professionalism than do commodities. For one thing, they work across the entire range of expert work—from the most simple to the most complex. Indeed, there are types of work so complex that individual professionals or small partnerships could not begin to attempt them—e.g., designing a skyscraper. Second, expert organizations are often not controlled by the professions themselves but by outsiders. The new hospital corporations are an obvious example, but the commercial ownership of large databases is perhaps to librarians a more familiar and threatening one. Finally, because of the support staff costs of such organizations and their common necessity of owning considerable numbers of physical items like machines and buildings, large expert organizations become subject as much to the rules of commercialism as to those of professionalism. This subjection can be direct, as in the hospital corporation, or indirect, as in the large public library system.

The future of librarianship thus hinges on what happens to the perpetually changing work of the profession in its three contexts: the context of larger social and cultural forces, the context of other competing occupations, and the context of competing organizations and com-

modities. To these complex contextual forces, any profession responds with varying policies and internal changes.

This discussion will now explore these three contexts of librarians' professional work and their impact on the link between librarians and their work, what I have elsewhere (Abbott, 1988) called the link of jurisdiction. It will also be suggested what have been characteristic policy responses of other occupations in similar situations. Let me emphasize that I am not a technological prophet, nor indeed any other kind of prophet. What follows are largely speculations informed by theory and by comparison with other occupations.

I begin with changes in the context of larger social and cultural forces. The most obvious, and possibly the most important, social force affecting librarianship now is technological change. Some technological changes take the form of making old things easier to do—key word indexing, for example, enables faster construction of bibliographies. Other technological changes fully replace earlier work—as the sharing of online cataloging information has done. Still others enable things that have never been done before—e.g., offering visual or multimedia databases for client use. If these changes follow the patterns of earlier ones, they will not end up replacing librarians themselves. People thought microfilm would do that; we were all going to have copies of the Library of Congress in our basements. But of course microfilm was simply used to extend the holdings of the average library, not to replace congregate libraries with decentralized personal ones. It seems to me that the same will happen again. Future central holdings (that is, holdings in libraries and other data depositories) will be extended even more, or perhaps at the same time, as current central holdings become further decentralized. To the extent that decentralization does occur, it will undoubtedly follow the present pattern, where the most active holders of decentralized information materials—e.g., paperback books—are also the heaviest users of centralized ones (I have 4,000 personal books in my house, but I also have 100 on loan from the university library). Although some fear elimination of librarians as brokers between users and data, no one with any real experience of serious library or database work could imagine that the modern division of intellectual labor has no place for those who specialize in massaging databases. Whether that specialization need be or will be a lifetime career, however, remains an open question.

Perhaps the central issue in library technology lies in its relation to the competing sources of expertise. Librarians have long relied on resources held or produced by private firms—e.g., Gale Research, Wilson, Bowker, Marquis, and so on. With the coming of proprietary databases, that dependence is increased. Moreover, the newer firms lack the librarian roots of their predecessors and perhaps their intense dependence on the library market. A move to fee-for-database service is already occurring and

librarians, or rather the organizations that hire librarians, must either absorb those fees or pass them on. The resolution of this conflict between commercialism and professionalism depends for the most part on the stance of the organizations that employ librarians and not on the librarians themselves. The dependence of the profession on organizations thus increases on both sides—that of the vendor and that of the employer.

Other forces seem likely to increase this dependence in the future. For example, second-level professional journals may well not exist on paper in twenty years. There will simply be online refereed databases of articles. Such databases will exist centrally, and whoever controls them will control much about the structure of knowledge. Now it is true that sometimes technology democratizes things. CDs have probably democratized the community of musical recording artists, for example, and microfilm distributed ownership of rare materials far more widely than ever before. But in scholarly libraries, at least, it is hard to see anything in the future but centralization and standardization, both of which will replace important skills in the current librarian's armamentarium.

Another social force of importance is the change in the basic audience for librarian's claims of jurisdiction, and indeed, in the basic clientele of the profession. Commercial organizations have immense needs for information—particularly about markets but also about suppliers and labor forces. Within such commercial information, there is a clear continuum from quantitative information about credit through information about consumer likes and dislikes to purely qualitative information provided by focus groups and similar things.

This information is gathered, centralized, and sold completely outside the normal channels of libraries by market research and consulting firms, most of which began as commercial providers of quantitative information. Here the differentiation is one of clientele. Small businesses look to the local library for this sort of market data, although it is increasingly available from producer services firms as well. But national retailers' need for proprietary information creates a market demand for data and indexing tools that are deliberately withheld from the general community of library users.

Another aspect of this change of audiences is the changing role of the state with respect to the profession. The state is among the librarians' most important clients, employing in schools and public libraries probably the vast majority of actual library workers in the current economy. But the local agencies that have funded libraries for so many years must now support as well the many social services offloaded by the federal government. Like higher education, libraries now face direct budget competition from housing, corrections, welfare, unemployment, and other social needs. Even primary and secondary schools have not fared particularly well in this competition, although they claim public monies on the

same basis—the necessity of a free and educated citizenry—as do the librarians. The new roles of state and local government make precarious much of traditional library work.

I will turn now to cultural forces. It is obvious that the major cultural force affecting librarianship is internal intellectual change—the production of new forms of knowledge that enable new forms of storage and retrieval of information. But Borges (1964) was right. Nothing has greater potential for producing disinformation than the astounding technology that some feel has brought about a “new information society.” There is a big difference between storage of data, which new technologies have immensely improved, and retrieval of information, which they have not.

The problem is not a new one. The Western world has suffered from data overload for centuries. One of my areas of research, as it happens, is career patterns among German musicians during the eighteenth century. There is in fact far more information readily available about those careers than can possibly be mastered. For example, there is a book listing the status and the exact amount paid to every musician ever employed by the Habsburg court between the reign of Charles the Fifth in the early sixteenth century and the waning days of the Habsburg Empire in the 1860s (Kochel, 1976). *That* is data; making *sense* of it is information.

The central problem here is retrieval and summary. Although keyword indexing has made certain kinds of retrieval easy, there exists as yet no automated means for extracting and summarizing qualitative information across qualitative databases, at least none that goes substantially beyond simple listing, cross-classifying, and categorizing. For quantitative information, such methods exist in the vast array of statistics and meta-analysis but not for qualitative information. However, if scholarly journals become more centralized and standardized (which seems likely), there could arise highly standardized article formats that might support automated analysis. Should this happen, both scholarship and librarianship would be radically transformed. For if such automated methods arise, they will come from research on artificial intelligence (AI) and other forms of optimizing algorithms. But producing them will require systematic restructuring of the current means not only of storing information, but also of setting it forth in the first place, a restructuring that will involve the collaboration of librarians, scholars, and information scientists. As in most such cases, the change will probably come from a hybrid group that forms among elites in librarianship, scholarship, and the AI community. Although beginning among elites, such developments would later transform everyday academics and librarianship. But it is by no means yet clear that such methods will appear.

A different and, in many ways, more profound cultural force is the drift of modern culture toward being a culture of images. Television is far more important to most people than is print. Our most reliable stud-

ies show that, for every leisure hour spent watching television, the average employed American man spends twenty minutes reading and about five minutes in conversation. Women spend only marginally more. Moreover, visual images are rapidly seeping into education, one of librarianship's central clienteles (and, especially on the funding side, one of its chief competitors). On theoretical grounds, it could be predicted that there will be sooner or later a battle between librarians and audiovisual/media personnel in local schools over who will control the physical things that embody the cultural resources of the schools. It could also be predicted that the AV people will win, particularly as a younger generation of teachers arrives who are themselves trained in visual instruction and who spent their youth watching MTV. The central fight will be over the control of multimedia instruction.

This battle will be only the first skirmish of a war that will pit print against images for centuries to come. Elizabeth Eisenstein's (1979) magnificent research on the impact of print shows how unexpected, how strange, yet how remorseless such a change can be. It will obviously transcend our lifetimes but, even within them, it will bring dozens of conflicts within and between professions throughout society. For example, people will probably soon demand that public libraries spend larger and larger portions of their resources on video collections. Why should people pay to rent videos while they support book "renters" with their taxes?

But not all the news is bad. As the mass of visual images piles up, there will be massive new amounts of work for librarians—how best to catalog? to store? to index? Images mean new work. If the librarians are smart, they will absorb both the work and the people (the audiovisual specialists) who do it.

The battle of print and picture will also become a battle between classes, for print culture will become "high culture"—the culture of the elite—just as print-based education, dealing as it does with philosophical arguments and complex reasoning that cannot be reduced to pictures—will become once again the education of the elite. Within a couple of decades, mass education will undoubtedly use more visual aids than print media if it does not already do so. This means that librarianship's attitudes toward the new media will have crucial implications for its future class allies, which in turn will affect both its claims to legitimacy as the primary access provider to cultural resources and, by extension, its continued access to public funds.

A more complicated, and likely more pressing, issue lies in changes in the foundations by which professional knowledge is made legitimate. The new emphasis on multiculturalism forces librarians to confront anew the value judgments they make in materials selection and related work. Even indexing and retrieval can ultimately be defined as political; like selection, they have a natural slant toward the culturally standard—stan-

dard in language, in values, and so on. Does the foundation (and, consequently, the justification) of librarianship lie in its technological expertise, increasingly the justification used by most other professions? Or does that foundation lie in a commitment to access, a kind of democracy of culture? And if that function of democratic access is indeed central to librarianship, then how does it shape and limit librarians' exercise of their own value judgments about what books or images are worth acquiring? One can imagine a world in which acquisitions became a routine public political issue, not simply an occasional dustup over obscenity or creationism. Perhaps people would like to vote on the exact percentages of romance fiction, kung fu movies, and world literature to be purchased. In a day when science itself has become largely directed by political concerns, this professional nightmare seems very possible. It will be an increasingly present one for school and local public librarians.

Special and academic librarians face a different set of value complexities. Their problem lies in the temptation to dictate the value judgments at the core of the scholarly production process. Once journals have gone electronic as unprinted but refereed databases, mostly supported by commercial publishers, there will be an enormous tension around criteria for selection, which have hitherto belonged solely to editors by virtue of their scholarly skills. As the ERIC database shows, the temptation in the new media will be to publish much more than any editor would. From this will emerge a multiple debate among database managers, librarians, editors, and authors concerning structure and output. A retreat into technical matters may save the special librarians—as it has in their previous battles with academics. But the issue is nonetheless complex.

This first context of external social and cultural forces, then, confronts librarians with numerous choices and a murky future. The Borgesian library—with its endless perfections, its information so vast as to be disinformation—is assuredly brought upon us by technological change. At the same time, the transformation of print into picture makes that Borgesian library a labyrinth of mirrors. All of these changes bring new professional competitors to librarianship—the audiovisual people, the artificial intelligence people, the computer people—even while they renew and rearrange old competitions with groups like commercial providers and academics. These swirling forces push different sections of the profession in different ways, presenting each with new and different opponents. Thus, the changes in the second context, that of other professions, arise in large measure out of the changes in the first, that of larger social and cultural trends.

My discussion now turns to other forms of expertise. Given the social and cultural changes just discussed, do we expect information expertise to survive in individuals or will it come to inhere mainly in organizations and commodities? We can dispense at once with what might be called the

“scare tactic” arguments. The first of these is the commodification argument, that there are techniques just around the corner that will make all of librarianship easy work for untrained personnel. Even if inertia and expense did not make this argument ludicrous, history would. Microfilm made the same promises and simply helped librarians expand their work. The same is true of most technological changes. There will always be a need for information brokers. They may look very different very soon, but they will still exist.

However, one result of heavy commodification in librarianship is quite likely an increased distance between a core professional elite that is concerned with maintaining and upgrading the increasingly centralized knowledge and physical resources of the profession—algorithms, databases, indexing systems, repositories—and a larger but peripheral group that provides actual client access to those resources. This kind of vertical differentiation—already prevalent in a profession split into school, public, academic, and special librarians—will probably increase. This pattern is a common one throughout the professions—accounting and statistics are both organized in such a manner.

The second “scare tactic” argument is proletarianization—i.e., the argument that professionals are becoming low status nonautonomous workers. Many scholars point to bureaucratic employment as an indicator of proletarianization. But librarians, unlike doctors, have nearly always worked in organizations. And in any case, librarians do in fact have skills that organizations cannot find elsewhere as they can the skills of manual laborers or laborers with firm-specific capital. As a result, then, the argument of general proletarianization can safely be discounted.

I now consider some basic predictions about the balance of professions, organizations, and commodities in the expertise of the future. First, even though commodification may shrink professions, the fact that only professionals can train new professional workers means that expertise in people has to survive at some minimal level. However, the case of quantitative information shows that, as information becomes increasingly centralized and privatized, even this function of reproduction can be taken away from its classic home in universities and located directly within commercial organizations. For example, Arthur Andersen hires directly from undergraduate school and trains these individuals as accountants at its own college on a campus it bought from a defunct liberal arts school. Thus, while individual professionals will continue to train their successors, there is no guarantee that this training will take place in the free and open university context as at present; after all, the expenditures of commercial organizations for training now rival the entire U. S. higher-education budget.

A second area of prediction concerns the fact that the tradeoff be-

tween expertise in people and in organizations depends so heavily on sheer size. Some resources necessary for professional work are too big for anyone but organizations to own; some jobs are too big for individual professionals to accomplish. The archetypical “big job” of library work—the large-scale research project—is still accomplished in a segmental fashion, with mostly parallel processing and a minimal division of labor. It would seem, then, that organizations do not have a great advantage. As mentioned earlier, nobody possesses effective commodified ways of speeding qualitative research.

Granted, large databases are a necessary condition for that speed, and increasingly such databases are too expensive for individuals or small groups to own. But historically, librarians, like doctors, have always managed to get somebody else to actually own the expensive physical capital they need—in their case, the books and other materials they work with. The main change today is that commercial organizations, not governments and nonprofits, own much of that physical capital. The best demographic information in the United States does not reside in the public census data sitting in deposit libraries but in the massive and very private marketing databases. We can thus expect increasing organizational dominance.

The general shape of the future library profession is thus hard to foresee. On the one hand, the kind of mass “associational” professionalism familiar from nineteenth-century law or medicine—in which each individual professional is a kind of self-contained provider—is gone from librarianship, if indeed it ever existed. It is of course gone from medicine and law as well. In law, as in accounting, architecture, and a host of other professional areas, the common form of professionalism today is the pattern that can be called elite professionalism. An elite dominates provision of services to large-scale clients, controls provision of instruction in universities, and directs the main march of professional affairs. A much larger periphery provides services to innumerable small clients on a somewhat nineteenth-century basis.

But librarianship is in fact much closer to engineering than to law or accounting. It has always worked for organizations. It has always consisted of a loose aggregation of groups doing relatively different kinds of work but sharing a common orientation. Like engineering, it has also always involved multiple types of credentials, accepting not only its own several levels of credentials but also the credentials of other fields. Just as many engineers have physics degrees, so many librarians have arts and sciences degrees.

It may well turn out that such an occupation—what we might call a federated profession—will adapt to the current changes in work and organizations far more effectively than have occupations like medicine that

are still invested in the nineteenth-century model of associational professionalism. That adaptation takes place by sacrificing certain aspects of nineteenth-century professionalism for an increased ability to move and change. What do federated professions give up? They give up absolute credential closure. They give up monopoly of service. They give up personal autonomy. With these things they also give up a certain clarity of identity and perhaps the possibility for certain kinds of high status. What do they gain? They gain the generalist's ability to have some members of the profession ready for any contingency, some knowledge available to follow any new development. They gain the ability to absorb subfields that challenge them. They can thus survive in rapidly changing environments as specialists cannot. They gain too the ability to coopt organizational resources for their own ends. Federated professionalism is not a bad choice. More important, it is probably the only one available to librarians.

This analysis of the future of the profession does not directly involve the individuals currently in the occupation. That the profession as a whole is a successful generalist does not mean that individual specialists within it cannot find their knowledge outmoded, their work no longer necessary, their very client no longer extant.

But here too engineering provides an example. We know that engineers' careers typically begin with ten to fifteen years at the bench. That is as long as school knowledge lasts. Then many engineers move into administration, operations, or team management. Others retrain themselves for new areas—some, for example, moving into teaching. Librarians too are used to relearning their jobs every decade or so, and that is in fact the paradigmatic experience in most professions.

Very few in America have ever finished their work careers doing what they started out doing. Among the professions today, veterinarians and dentists are the only major examples. Many doctors and lawyers drift out of routine practice into administration, research, or some other venue. It is always easy to look around at librarians in various life stages and to order them into a kind of artificial life history. But ask any librarian—as an individual—about her history and one hears a tale of wandering. For most professions, for most professionals, for most of modern history, wandering, relearning, and changing are the typical, not the atypical, experiences.

The future of the profession of librarianship thus seems clear if very complex and contingent. The profession will no doubt continue its generalist strategy and federated structure. Individuals will continue to flow in and out of the profession at many levels and career stages. To the profession as a whole, the central challenges lie in embracing the various information technologies of the future and the groups that service them.

This embrace will end up redefining the profession. But that is necessary to survival.

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