Library Management

Globalisation, culture and social capital: library professionals on the move
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GUEST EDITORIAL

Globalisation, culture and social capital: library professionals on the move

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to connect the stories and experiences of library professionals who have chosen to take up positions in other countries. The library professionals were asked to reflect on their experiences. This paper tends to connect and conceptualize the different experiences.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is purely theoretical and it introduces and links concepts of social capital, thrust, and national culture and characteristics to the experiences of the library professionals. The theoretical framework is used loosely to interpret and discuss the experiences.

Findings – The paper is not empirical in a traditional sense. This implies that there are no findings based on data. The paper introduces and discusses concepts and apply these to material based on experiences and it is indicated that the theoretical frameworks presented are useful in relation to contextualising the diverse experiences. It is also indicated that the concepts of social capital are closely related to concepts concerning national or regional cultural characteristics.

Practical implications – The practical implications are rather simple but difficult to achieve. It is a question about respect and it is a question about learning other patterns of communication, norms and values which are indispensable in cross cultural relationships.

Originality/value – With reference to the author’s previous research it is indicated that phenomena in library and information science and practice take different forms according to the cultural settings. This is an important result in an ever increasing international world.

Keywords Globalization, National cultures, Social capital, Libraries

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction
Some library directors and other leading professionals in the field of library and information were asked to write about the experiences of taking on a job in another country than their native country. The papers are not academic in a narrow sense of the word, but they form a very coherent and reflective approach to national differences and it is evident that the authors have spent time to reflect on the consequences and effects of a job in another country – and in some cases on another continent.

The results are presented in this issue of Library Management. It makes a very interesting read with quite some lessons. The author of the present paper was asked to “write around” the papers and put them into some kind of perspective. This gives the author a high degree of freedom in structuring this introductory paper.
Together, the papers presents interesting case stories that illustrates important points and features of an ever increasing internationalisation of the workforce including librarians and information scientists and information workers. The papers are also in a form that illuminates the growing body of literature on national characteristics, national and professional culture.

The eight papers do in most cases represent moves from one western oriented country to another. Two of the papers represent moves from one circle of culture to another.

It is easy to envisage more exotic moves than the ones told about in this issue. Nevertheless, many of the lessons from the papers give such sound and convincing advices that the lessons learned are transferable to other kind of settings. Without any doubt, this will be a topic to be discussed the coming years as globalisation and its consequences hit us all – for better or worse. Globalisation appears to become a fact of life that will influence many professionals and it is in this context extremely important to be aware of the tender relationships between national cultures, organisational cultures, and different value systems and to be able to interpret them appropriately in a sensible context.

This paper can be considered as a follow up and an extension of a paper investigating the context of culture and institutional imperatives and its influence on the employment of management tools and leadership styles in United Kingdom and Denmark (Pors et al., 2004). The inspiration behind the study was Matthews et al. (2001) and Kekäle and Kekaλé (1995) who conducted comparative studies of European quality management practices and different theories on culture. On the theoretical level, the study explored the concepts of Hofstede (Pors et al., 2004). The theoretical level details different aspects of the national culture or climate and uses this as some of the factors explaining the different use of quality tools. We started the paper with the intention to model the propensity to introduce and use certain management tools and approaches based on characteristics of national cultures. It is difficult to classify management tools and approaches but we have tried to find the main content in relation to the masculine (hard) or feminine (soft) approach as suggested by Hofstede. In reality, the context in which a tool or an approach is used really matters.

It was obvious that different countries implement management tools and approaches in different ways. The national culture can probably provide a tentative explanation for many of the variations observed. The concept of national culture could provide an explanation for the way new ideological movements like reinventing government, new public management and the like are implemented as institutional imperatives in different countries. We had strong indicators suggesting that the culture of assessment is much more pervasive in the United Kingdom than in Denmark. In relation to employment of tools the difference between library types are much less than in the Danish system. We emphasise that a culture of assessment does not necessarily consent certain tools as regulations or written imperatives. It is simply something that permeates the organisational culture and the beliefs and assumptions embedded herein.

Our conjecture was that the institutional imperatives are stronger in the United Kingdom. This follows the nature of the culture of assessment in Britain. Assessment tools and strategic managerial approaches are more embedded in the culture of organisations. The findings gave a confirmation of the relevance of the tentative model. It is observable that the differences in discourse and in tools employment probably are
related to differences in the national culture. The manager’s position in relation to the
cross-pressure between institutional imperatives and freedom of decisions and actions
also plays a role, at least in relation to factors like the sense of job security, workload
and wellbeing at the job. This is, of course, also part of the organisational culture. This
culture is important as a zone of acceptance in relation to which tools and managerial
approaches are conceivable and legitimate in a given institution.

Social capital and cultures

The concept of social capital has been very popular in the social science literature
during the last couple of decades (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2006). This is not the place
to discuss the concept in detail. It suffices to say that it is inspired by the writings of
economists, political scientist and sociologists.

Social capital is an elusive concept. It is interpreted different in various disciplinary
settings. Economists tend to look at the concept as a feature that can decrease economic
transactions cost because of the inherent trust between the actors. Other social scientist
have emphasised the concept in relation to the development of common norms in
different types of group settings.

The most common empirical interpretation or operational definition of the
theoretical concept is embedded in the concept of trust. The interpretation of trust is
normally conducted through means of questionnaires measuring individuals trust in
relation to other individuals and to public institutions. Several world wide studies
using the same methodology have been conducted and the results are a ranking of
countries based on the amount of trust (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2006). Trust is
measured in relation to a general interpretation of trust and in relation to trust in
relation to different social institutions like the legal system, the political system and the
like. Trust is operationalised as generalised trust and institutional trust. Trust is used
as an indicator of the coherence of the society and the cohesiveness of the different
parts of society. In this way, trust is closely connected to the value system.

It is important to be aware that trust can take negative forms. To much trust in a
group and too much cohesiveness in a group can imply that this group closes its
boundaries excluding others and in that way contributes to an overall decrease in
genral trust.

Trust in a general sense is probably related closely to values, norms and behaviour
in a society implying reciprocity. Reciprocity means that people trust each other and
that a dominant value and behaviour is that nobody cheats and receives for example
welfare benefits if they are able to provide for themselves. In the same way,
institutional trust is conditioned by the same type of rules. We have to believe and
experience that public in-stutions work for the common good in a proper legal and
efficient way according to the objectives.

There have been conducted several world wide surveys measuring general trust in
different countries (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). A Danish variation called SoCap
(Svendsen and Svendsen, 2006) has also been employed measuring both general and
institutional trust in 21 countries.

The investigations into general and institutional trust are not directly related to
other strands of research into cultural differences among nations and subgroups in
nations; however, it is the same type of information one gets with the employment of
different measurement instruments (Dahl, 2004).
One of the most famous researchers working with cultural differences is Hofstede. Hofstede’s (1981, 1991) pioneering work on cultural differences appears to be especially interesting in a management context. We will limit ourselves to identify some of the more pertinent aspects of his analysis. It is important to note that his analysis is a very detailed one operating on several levels from the individual to country over social groups. Hofstede introduces the idea of a shared, set of values held by a society. These values results in behavioural patterns. Hofstede (1991) further defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from another”. Hofstede operates with four – in his later writings five dimensions – categorising values and behaviour. These are:

1. power distance;
2. individualism;
3. masculinity; and
4. insecurity avoidance

Many western countries are characterised by a small power distance, which means that equality, decentralisation and democracy are appreciated values whereas submission, centralisation and hierarchy has less appeal.

As to the second of Hofstede’s dimensions, collectivism versus individualism, where the collectivist emphasises organisational harmony, employee loyalty and an identity related to the group, the individualist, on the other hand, stresses honesty and truth more than harmony and loyalty and has an identity based on the single individual.

The masculine-feminine dimension is the difference between a masculine result-oriented point of view and a feminine process-oriented point of view. It has also to do with the way people communicate and how they perceive themselves.

The fourth dimension, distinguishes between weak and strong uncertainty avoidance. If you possess weak uncertainty avoidance you seem to thrive on chaos understood as, for example, fast and discontinuous change, unstructured and muddy situations, action on insufficient information, few or no rules, unknown risks and basic uncertainty.

Hofstede’s theories are based on national characteristics and it is important to emphasise that he warns against generalisations or stereotyping. In the single country, there exist of course diversity based on social class, gender, educational level and other background factors.

The theory has many similarities to a model forwarded by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997). They identified seven cultural dimensions of which several were very similar to the dimensions employed by Hofstede. It is probably fair to state that the two kinds of ways to identify essentials of national culture do not differ very much. Both models are based on a belief that culture consists of values and preferred behaviour related to the values. The seven value dimensions identified were: Universalism versus particularism, Communitarianism versus individualism, Neutral versus emotional, Defuse versus specific cultures, Achievement versus ascription, Human-Time relationship and Human-Nature relationship. Several of the dimensions are more or less the same as the ones used by Hofstede.

Schwartz (1994) has worked in much more detail with the value dimension. The advantage of his approach is that he investigated more than 60,000 people around the
world. He has identified 10 different value types each comprising of several values. His work is more oriented towards the preferred behaviour in different cultures than the work of Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner.

In this context the notion of a profession is important. One of the many characteristics of a profession is its value orientation. Librarianship probably shares a common set of values and practices partly independent of but also influenced by national cultures.

It is evident that culture consists of many factors that are shared by nations and by social groups and these factors are guidelines for behaviour and interpretation of the environment and for interpretation of human interrelationships. At the very least, the concept of culture consists of both values and norms, including basic assumptions which affects behaviour. Together they manifest themselves in human institutions. An example of this was given in the beginning of this paper. A comparison between national cultures in UK and Denmark indicated according to Hofstede’s different rankings on the masculine-feminine scale and the results of this were interpreted as different adoption styles in relation to organisational recipes and different ways of conducting example leadership. Finally, culture is learned through mental programming, norm internationalisation and adaptation of behavioural patterns seen as appropriate.

Social capital operationalised as trust is only part of the broader scheme of culture, however it is important because many of the principles concerning values and behavioural patterns are embedded in trust – be it general or institutional.

Experiences in context
In this paragraph some of the lessons learned by the invited papers are emphasised and characterised.

Mel Collier points to different types of crossing boundaries. One of them is the cross from the public sector to the private sector. The other change is a cross-boundary change moving from UK to Holland and Belgium. He structures the changes in differences in job content most evident in the move from a public institution to a private organisation and the other change is related to the cross-boundary move where the changes are found in the environment and probably also in different traditions and decision-making structures. Here we do find evidence of organisational cultures connected to the overall objectives of the organisations and national cultural differences connected to national cultures.

Graham Jefcoate’s tells a story about moves that are done in nearly the same cultural environment. His story is about a move from UK to Germany and the Netherlands. He raises several important points that it would be good to consider for anyone planning to work overseas. He raises the very important question of language skills. They are important and one has to take care. Mostly, it is a question about expectations. Jefcoate also raises the question about different traditions for contracts and goals for the single professional and points to the fact that the rules and regulations differ very much just as the perceived need for written objectives does. He also points to leadership style as a topic it is extremely important to be aware of. Bureaucratic traditions, outspokenness in staff-relations are all factors one has to consider carefully because they differ very much from institution to institution, from country to country.
Several of the authors are Australians that have moved to Canada or United Kingdom. There are four papers and Vicky Williamson’s paper is a personal account on the move from a top position in Australia to another top position in Canada. She addresses all the practical and motivational stuff related to a career move and it is enlightening to see that even a move from one country to another in the same cultural context poses problems due to different organisational structures and traditions. The paper also emphasises the global nature of the issues the profession deals with. There can be differences in emphasis but overall, the issues, values and norms in the profession are easily recognised in both countries. Williamson also addresses some of the more practical matters one should remember when moving to another country.

Janine Schmidt also moved from Australia to Canada. Like Susan McKnight her reflections are based on a deep knowledge on the cultural and organisational differences and she uses the theoretical literature as a departing point for her experiences. Interestingly, she points out that travelling and the internet have changed national and regional cultures the same way as the ever increasing migration has. Her discourse considers the relationships between national culture, organisational culture and leadership styles. It is of course difficult or impossible to generalise about the relative importance of national culture versus organisational culture, but it is evident that both factors must be taken into account. Janine Schmidt also touch upon the universalism of the library profession. She finds variation in both values and practices and some of these variations are related to both cultural and political systems. The question about organisational culture versus national culture is treated in relation to Australia and Canada and the author finds that most or at least many of the experienced differences is related to organisational cultures.

Helen Hayes describes a career move from Australia to Scotland. The move has been to a classic and traditional university. One could argue that she emphasises the importance of being aware of history when one is placed in a management position that is supposed to enforce change. Embedded in the traditional universities is a specific organisational culture that it is very important to be conscious about. The classic and traditional universities are probably less skill-oriented in their value system than many of the newer universities and if this is true, change processes must take a different course necessitating a more profound discussion before agreements concerning changes are made. Helen Hayes also points to the fact that the propensity to invite strangers and make friends seems to be different in Scotland and Australia signifying different degrees of openness to foreigners.

Susan McKnight analyses her move from Australia to England. Her account is a bit different from most of the others as it follows a more theoretical framework guiding her personal reflections and experiences. McKnight points also on the problem of language differences even if it is just rather insignificant differences in dialects. She sees the main problem as “it is that the real challenges to an expatriate senior manager lie in working within the cultural differences and national stereotypes, understanding the organisational environment and, importantly, understanding yourself and how your behaviours and attitudes can influence those around you”. Obviously Susan McKnight has reflected on cultural differences and leadership styles in contexts that look very similar on the surface. She emphasises the local differences and also the organisational culture as very important to be aware of. She also raises the important question on the relationship between personality and culture.
The last two papers are about moves that are a bit more exotic. One of the papers are written by three professionals comparing experiences. They come from different Western countries and they all decided to work in Hong Kong. The last paper reports on an Australian’s experiences as a consultant in Vietnam.

The next paper is a collective story. Three librarians from USA, UK and USA/Ireland have all taken up positions in academic libraries in Hong Kong. On the surface, this looks like very considerable changes in culture and working environments. On the other hand, Hong Kong is a multi-cultural city with a very high IT-profile and many of its institutions have roots from the United Kingdom. The authors find both profound similarities and dissimilarities between the institutions they come from and the library work situation in Hong Kong. However, it is evident from the paper that there are considerable cultural differences in relation to both working conditions and in relation to personal and social interaction. Working relationships appear to be a bit more formal than they are in USA and UK and decision-making processes are slower and probably a bit more complicated.

Michael Robinson is another Australian library professional who decided to work in a quite different setting. His story concerns his experiences working in Vietnam. Robinson worked as a consultant on developing Learning Resources Centres in Vietnam on behalf of his Australian University. Working as a consultant and project manager is probably very different from taking up a more stable position as manager, but his observations are valid also in other contexts. He experience differences in the professional culture and values due to the fact that many of the Vietnamese academic librarians tended to perceive themselves as guardians and custodians often in relation to the closed collections. He also analyses the general political culture and its consequences for decision-making processes but most of all, Robinson stresses the all important need for cultural sensitivity dealing in another culture. The problems and challenges participating in development projects are outlines and they do not appear that different from projects conducted by western countries in the East European countries after 1990 (Pors and Edwards, 2001).

Culture and trust around the world
In Hofstede's ranking of countries based on his original 4-dimensional model the ranking of countries in relation to the dimensions illustrated huge differences among countries. One of the interesting results was that the Nordic countries were special. Only the Netherlands scored approximately like the Nordic countries. Most of all they were very “feminine” and they had a very low degree of “uncertainty avoidance”. They were also rather individualistic and they had a very low power distance.

Except for the dimension concerned with masculinity versus femininity they were very much like many other western countries like United Kingdom. We find the same picture in the results from world wide surveys on social capital, trust and values. This indicates that the operationalised trust measures phenomena not that different from the studies focusing on culture.

Table I below takes the ranking from Hofstede’s dimensions and the ranking from the surveys of values and trust in different countries. In the original tables from Hofstede 75 countries participated and were described in relation to the 4 dimensions. If we look at power distance, we find that nearly all the countries represented in this issue has a low power distance. Vietnam and Hong Kong appears to be different
indicating an acceptance of a higher degree of acceptance of inequality in the power structure of the society. All the countries with exception of Vietnam and Hong Kong has a high degree of individualism. The two exceptions are probably much more oriented towards “group thinking and group orientation”. On the masculinity-femininity dimension we find a greater variation with the Netherlands and Vietnam as the countries that scores lowest on the scale indicating general softer societies. With the exception of Belgium, all the countries scores low on insecurity avoidance indicating abilities to cope with changes and situations with insecurity. All the countries have a high or middle degree of general trust, which indicates societies in which people as a whole trust other people and the nation’s social institutions.

In Hofstede’s ranking we find a participation of 74 countries. In the World Value Survey we find a ranking of 86 countries.

Earlier in this paper, the differences between Denmark and United Kingdom were analysed in relation to adoption of management tools and different aspects of leadership attributes. In relation to the dimensions of Hofstede, there were differences in the masculinity-femininity dimension. Adding to this difference is also a rather marked difference in trust. These differences correspond with the national variations in the professional discourse on topics like leadership styles, empowerment, delegation of responsibilities, freedom in the work and the strength of control mechanisms at different levels in society as a whole and in the institutional set up of control mechanisms.

Most of the professional moves in this issue are between UK, Canada and Australia. These countries are not very different from each other in their value systems. This implies that that a move between these countries probably is without huge cultural problems. There are of course differences in legislative systems, the status of professions, institutional traditions and also differences related to the development of the English language. The papers also reflects that the cultural differences are much more complicated when one takes up a position in a country with a very different value system.

The papers in this issue also reflect that moves become less complicated because of the value system embedded in the profession. There is of course variations in the value system. The difference focus on librarians as custodians with all the implications or librarians that focus on user and user needs. This difference reflects structures and values in society and is of course susceptible to change, because it also reflects the technological development of the workplace.

Many of the authors in this issue ponder on the question of the relationship between national values and behaviour and organisational culture. Organisational culture is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Power distance</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Insecurity avoidance</th>
<th>General trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Ranking according to Hofstede and SoCap for the countries mentioned in this paper.
without doubt a very important concept even if is difficult to define. There exists probably a correlation between the value system in a nation or a country and the most preferred ways to structure organisations. The organisational culture will also tend to correlate with the national culture and with dominant structures of organisations.

Conclusion

There is no doubt the papers in this issue gives food for thought. Together they provide insights into practical issues when library professionals move across boundaries. They also point to serious theoretical and intellectual problems connected to the process of globalisation or internationalisation. These issues become more and more serious as the process of internationalisation takes speed. It is of course true that we also witness a process especially due to multiculturalism and the technological development that tend to decrease the national differences differences, but many of these differences are very much embedded in local and national value systems and they will probably live on for many decades to come.

All the authors in this issue demonstrate a great deal of respect for other cultures, values and traditions, which of course makes the move less painful. Also, they have a very reflective attitude to differences. These traits are probably personal and can be interpreted as an important ingredient in the decision to cross boundaries.

Both the national culture and the set-up of organisational culture are elements that are important to be aware of in an international world. These concepts can be used to enlighten for example problems concerning the ways organisational recipes travels, spread and become adopted in different settings. It is pertinent that especially managers have insight into this time of phenomena, when they decide to cross boundaries.

References


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Moving on: transferability of library managers to new environments

Mel Collier
Catholic University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to discuss what the main transferable skills of senior library managers are when they move to a different work environment, such as from the academic to the business sector, or from a home country to another, possibly working in another language.

Design/methodology/approach – The difference between change of content and change of environment is discussed. The discussion is placed in the author’s experience of these sorts of change. The various changes in the author’s career are described and the differences between the sorts of change analysed. The key transferable skills in moving into new environments are suggested in conclusion.

Findings – Mobility into environments with significantly different structures and culture and a foreign working language is on the increase. Greater mobility, globalization and integration in Europe are likely to support this trend. Content and environment are two different aspects of this mobility. The key attributes that a senior manager brings to the new position are management experience, domain knowledge and a different perspective.

Research limitations/implications – The discussion is based on the author’s own experience and observations.

Originality/value – The paper provides an analysis of experience of mobility between sectors, countries and language.

Keywords Library management, Skills flexibility, Labour mobility

Introduction

This paper has its origins in a question posed to the editor of this journal. The questioner wondered how well a senior library manager can function in a new environment such as in business or in another country, working in another language. The premise was that the special added value of a senior manager is the personal contacts and network from the previous job and that when these are no longer relevant in the new environment, his or her value as a director or manager is very limited. As someone who has made all of these moves over the last ten years, the question made me think, not because I have any doubts about the positive benefits of cross-sector and cross-border mobility, but because it is certainly so that in those situations one meets not only major cultural differences, which themselves are challenging enough, but seemingly endless legal, procedural and professional differences. These differences can be seen as problems or delights, sometimes both at the same time. This paper tries to summarise some of my experiences and observations as I moved from the public to private sector and then back to the public sector but in two different countries working in a new language. As will be seen I do not accept the questioner’s basic premise.
Contacts and networks, though of course important, are by no means the main value or skills a director from a different environment brings.

**Background**

It only makes sense to discuss the experience of change against the background of one’s previous experience. As a librarian since the early seventies my career was always closely bound up with innovation, mainly but not always connected with IT. After working in several universities and polytechnics in Scotland, Wales and England I became library director at the then Leicester Polytechnic, later De Montfort University. My role there expanded over time until I led one of the largest academic services divisions in UK. Between 1985 and 1993 my management portfolio grew from libraries to include progressively IT and communications, media and printing, the Centre for Educational Technology and Development, Teaching and Learning Development and academic staff development. During my time at De Montfort University we developed the university from 6,000 students on two campuses in Leicester to 29,000 students on nine campuses in central and eastern England. This involved not only converging existing internal services, but also merging services from new institutions and developing campuses and infrastructure.

In 1997 at the age of fifty I decided to go into the private sector, working as strategy director for a large international information services company in the business mainly (but by no means completely) of library supply. Subsequently I was appointed as Library Director at Tilburg University in the Netherlands and then to my current post at the (Dutch speaking) Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. During this period I was also part-time research professor at Northumbria University in Newcastle upon Tyne, England.

This summary is provided in order to underline that my career (and that of most of us nowadays) is characterized by change. Not only did my roles see much change, but they took place in the greatest period of change in libraries and publishing since the fifteenth century. My moves were but new chapters in a history of change. In the case of the move into the private sector, the content of the job changed; in the case of the moves to other countries it was the environment that changed.

**The private sector**

My role in the company was to help it move forward strategically into Internet business. The company had made several investments, but they were not yet well integrated into the business. There were also (just like in the public sector) several legacy systems that hindered progress and flexibility and implied heavier overheads. There were several operations working relatively independently in different countries. After an analysis done in conjunction with a colleague, we concluded that in respect of the serials supply business the company had to get seriously into Internet innovation, either by direct investment or acquisition, or get out. In the period of consolidation that followed in due course in the business, the company chose (correctly) to get out.

My role was to bring the sector knowledge and to think laterally. I was a member of the board, with access to the main board, but with no direct responsibility for the bottom line. Meanwhile I continued with professional activities including a visiting professorship and membership of the Library and Information Commission. The skills that I brought to the company were my knowledge of innovation and change.
management and the contacts in the market. The extent to which those contacts could lead to direct business opportunities were of course quite properly limited by normal open tendering processes. My focus was on seeing the strategic opportunities in the market and helping to develop or maintain the profile of the company. As should be expected with a company the culture was entirely focused on financial performance. In this respect I learned far more from the experience than the company gained from me. The atmosphere was friendly even though I occupied a curious and privileged position. Within the parameters of my strategic job, my prior skills were transferable and my advice was indeed acted upon. If I had been called upon to take over a senior position with a direct responsibility for major business targets my lack of previous business experience could certainly have been a greater challenge.

Moving to The Netherlands
Moving to take up the role of Library Director at Tilburg in The Netherlands was a different proposition. There I was confident that my long experience in library and learning management was completely transferable, but I had to do it in a completely new language. I set about learning Dutch in quick time and insisted from the beginning on being addressed in Dutch. This must have been very frustrating for my colleagues who had to repeat things a lot, but resulted in swift progress. The University had not actually required me to learn Dutch, but I took the view that for a manager (as opposed to a professor) it was essential to be able to speak in the language of the colleagues. The culture of the university was not greatly different from what I had been used to in England. It is often said that the Dutch professional scene closely resembles that of the UK. Tilburg is a relatively small campus based university with a fairly centralized approach to decision making and getting things done could be quite streamlined. There was an excellent co-operative atmosphere and the directors of services and directors of faculties worked particularly closely together. There were of course many procedural practices that differed from England and took some getting used to, not least consultation and staff management practices. The many practical differences in private life, such as residence regulations, health, insurance, taxation and property demanded much time and effort as well. But the main skills for which I was appointed were directly transferable into the new environment, as indeed were my personal contacts and networks which I was able to use positively for the university and for the national co-operative networks. I was warmly welcomed into UKB, the Dutch association of university and national libraries, and also into the activities of SURF, the organization that carries out systemic development of information, learning and IT nationally on behalf of higher education as a whole, much along the lines of JISC in the UK.

Moving to Belgium
Moving to Belgium was an environmental change of another sort. Having gained a good knowledge of Dutch at Tilburg, it was no problem in that respect to move to the Dutch speaking (Flemish) Catholic University of Leuven. The difference here is that Leuven is a large ancient university with different structures, traditions and culture than I found in Tilburg and in my previous British universities. Moreover, I had the specific task to carry out a programme of change management. As an experienced change manager I was well equipped for this as a process but inevitably my ideas for change would be influenced by systems and structures from elsewhere, which could
arouse sensitivities. The library system at Leuven comprises a central library, three campus libraries, seven faculty libraries in the humanities and a large library IT department providing services not only to the KU Leuven, but also to a large network of organizations throughout Belgium. Traditionally the Chief Librarian is a professor, so my double profile as professor and library director was particularly welcomed. This idea is carried through into the management structure of the library: each campus or faculty library in addition to its librarian has a professor (an “academic responsible”) who represents the library in the relevant faculty or group board. Of course, these academics also perform the role of representing the faculty in the main library committee, which is a practice to be found nearly everywhere.

The change management programme involves reorganization of the central library, setting up new central services for support of research, education, digital library and other overarching activities, introducing integrated policy for all libraries (for instance in personnel, quality management, collection development and preservation) and streamlining the consultative and decision making structures. The challenge is to bring into effect the changes that are needed in a culture and via decision-making processes that are different from those to which I have been accustomed. My skills and experience in change management are clearly transferable, indeed that is specifically why I was appointed, but ultimate success depends on handling the environment. As far as my existing contacts and networks are concerned, I can still use them to good effect in strategy and planning, whilst developing new ones, which is wholly positive. On the broader level, within the profession in Flanders, the experience is similar to the Netherlands. I can contribute to the professional associations, finding myself almost immediately secretary of the Flemish Association of Academic Libraries, and learning from them whilst bringing something new.

Content and environment
Moving into the private sector was therefore a content change: bringing knowledge and experience to an essentially different (albeit related) business. Whilst some principles apply across both sectors, for instance quality of service and customer satisfaction are essential both in the library and in library supply, developing a profit oriented business requires a different set of skills and experience, particularly in a publicly quoted company. This does not mean of course that the public sector library should not be business-like, quite the contrary. Many new practices and management ideas are imported to good effect from the private sector or from the business schools. However it is probably the case that a move into an essentially different business (a content change) is more difficult, with greater risks for both sides.

Moving into continental Europe was an environment change. All organizations have their own culture and structures and even within UK different cultures can be observed in different universities and with a single university. Certain tendencies however can be identified which may be more or less present in various regions. These can perhaps be best characterized by describing two extremes. It is possible to find universities with a seriously strong directive management, running their business within tight margins according to highly focused objectives, perhaps in response to competitive market conditions or demanding government policies. A number of universities in UK can be said to follow this model, which started with the newer post 1992 universities, but is now fairly widespread. Such universities will tend to develop
strong professional cadres focused on resources, results and value for money. At the other end it is possible to find universities where the emphasis is primarily on academic freedom, democratic decision-making and consultative or collegial processes. Reference is often made in such cases to the Humboldt principles of unity of research and education, intellectual freedom and breadth of study. Such universities will tend to subordinate development of professional cadres to these principles and processes. The ideal university is probably somewhere in between these two extremes.

Perhaps a good illustration of this is the issue of convergence: by which we mean bringing the library services together with other academic services such as computing services, learning development, and audio-visual services etc. under single management. This sort of management structure is now common in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and to some extent in the USA. A recent study of mine showed that in stark contrast convergence is hardly known in continental Europe (Collier, 2005). Convergence is an extension of the development of professional cadres where management skills developed in one group are transferred into a broader arena as a way of achieving common strategic goals for the institution. The scarcity of convergence in continental Europe is probably due to a general tendency towards the second of the extremes mentioned above. Where libraries are regarded as the preserve of the academic the link with, for example, IT services let alone educational development may simply not be contemplated, and if it were could well be regarded as a centralizing tendency and to be resisted.

Until now I have been discussing moving and changing in the context of taking up a position in the mainstream of the profession. There is of course a long and honourable history of senior library managers who travel or move to other countries for development purposes, usually on schemes financed by the various development agencies. In those cases they would almost by definition find very different environments and cultures. They may or may not work in the local language, usually perhaps not. Accounts of such experiences can be found for instance in the pages of Focus (Focus, 2006) of which the back issues are available freely online. Whilst there would be very similar issues involved it is arguable that to move for one’s permanent job into the mainstream of the profession in another country is a rather different proposition. Experience of consultancy or development work abroad on the other hand could well be excellent preparation for a career move.

Conclusion
It is certainly not new for senior library managers to move either into business or into different countries with the same mother tongue and it is demonstrable that some have done so with considerable success. What is perhaps more on the increase is that they are moving into environments with a significantly different structures and culture and a foreign working language. Greater mobility, globalization and integration in Europe are likely to support this trend. Content and environment are two different aspects of this mobility, each needing separate attention. The key attributes that a senior manager brings to the new position are management experience, domain knowledge and a different perspective: sometimes the revelation that there is another way to do things. Increase in mobility and exchange of experience can only enrich the individual, the institution and the profession.
References


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Working across cultures
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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this research is to show a mix of career reflections and personal observations about the decision-making process of changing employers and countries.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper covers some initial impressions of moving, living and working in another country, context and culture. It explores selected issues (some personal and some professional) and addresses the broader question of what factors impact such a move, such as environmental factors that are likely to make an overseas appointment an attractive and challenging career alternative.

Findings – Working in an international context might not be for everyone but those interested in working in another country can take some practical steps to help ensure a smooth transition to a new employer and a new country.

Originality/value – Provides a discussion on some important matters which need consideration when changing employers and moving countries. It is based on the personal experiences and observations of the author, who moved from Australia to Canada in 2006.

Keywords Change management, Career development

Paper type Research paper

Background

The invitation to write this article coincided with my move from Australia to Canada to accept the position of a senior leadership position as Dean of the University of Saskatchewan Library. This career move came after many years of work experience in Australian universities that included leadership and management positions in university administrations and academic libraries.

The article is a mix of career reflections and personal observations about the decision-making process of changing employers and countries. It also covers initial impressions of moving, living and working in another country, context and culture. It explores selected issues (some personal and some professional) and addresses the broader question of what factors impact such a move, such as environmental factors that are likely to make an overseas appointment an attractive and challenging career alternative.

As such, this takes for granted that the broad knowledge, skills and abilities of librarians who are educated, trained and experienced in the Australian context are “transportable” to other countries, contexts and cultures in the 21st century.

The global world of work in the 21st century

Progressively we live, learn and work in a global context. In recent years Australian politicians have made much about the so-called “brain-drain” and the movement of senior academic library practitioners to leadership positions overseas (including the United Kingdom and Canada). This has heightened awareness and speculation about overseas career opportunities for librarians and library administrators.
While there is a growing trend for Australians to work overseas, a recent report commissioned by the Federal Government’s Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) and undertaken by the Centre for Population and Urban Research at Monash University (Birrell et al., 2006), highlighted a substantial and increasing contribution from the international movement of skilled workers to Australia.

The report shows that 16,278 Australian professionals left Australia in 2004-2005, while 18,111 people in the professions arrived as visitors to Australia. These comings and goings are roughly equal and so in numerical terms at least, the brain-drain from resident losses is similar to the brain-gain from visitor movements. Accordingly, reports of a brain-drain within the Australian economy may have been exaggerated.

The other interesting finding from this report is that a surprisingly small percentage of tertiary-educated Australians are overseas. Just three per cent of Australia’s 3.6 million people with degrees were expatriates in other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. This compares with 32 per cent of Irish graduates, 32 per cent of New Zealanders with degrees, and 17 per cent of British who are tertiary educated.

Australia’s library labour market
We have all heard the phrase about the world being a small place. For the Australian library profession, especially those who work in academic libraries and higher institutions more generally, this is certainly so. Although we have all heard the phrase about the world being a small place, the Australian library profession, especially those who work in academic libraries and higher education institutions more generally, this is certainly so.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on Australia’s library labour market and the membership listing for the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) help put this into perspective. The 2006 membership listing for the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL), a peak body for Australian academic libraries, represented by the chief librarians of Australian university libraries lists 40 member institutions, including universities from every Australian state and territory.

According to a report, published in January 2006 by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) (Teece, 2006), the vital ABS statistics from Australia’s total workforce of almost 10 million employees for the Australian library workforce component, is as follows:

- The library workforce numbers nearly 29,000, including 13,000 librarians; 7,300 library assistants; 5,000 library technicians; and 3,500 archivists or intelligence professionals.
- Working in a library is ranked as a “medium sized occupation”.
- Librarians are markedly older than the average for Australian occupations and the library workforce is rapidly aging: 60 per cent are 45 or older, compared to 35 per cent in the total workforce. 86 per cent are 35 or more, compared to 55 per cent in the total workforce. Only 14 per cent are under 35, compared to 42 per cent in the total workforce. The median age is 46.
- The rate of librarian retirement in Australia is much higher than the rate of new entrants into the profession. For example, one quarter of professional and
paraprofessional library staff is over the age of 55, which is more than double (11 per cent) of the national workforce.

- Australian Librarians are paid relatively well when compared with the workforce as a whole. Librarians earn 119 per cent of the Australian average wage and library technicians earn 75 per cent.
- Librarians have a higher than average proportion of part-time workers among their ranks, with 37 per cent working part-time and 63 per cent working full time.
- Library work in Australia is highly feminised: 89 per cent of employed librarians and more than 97 per cent of library technicians are women. Among all librarians, about 52 per cent are women working fulltime; 37 per cent are women working part time; men working fulltime account for nearly 11 per cent. There are very few part time males.
- Librarians are spread across a range of industry sectors: 36 per cent work in cultural and recreation services; 24 per cent in education; 17 per cent in government administration and defence; nine per cent in property and business services; and five per cent in health and community services.
- Geographically, New South Wales has 41 per cent of the workforce, Victoria 22 per cent, Queensland 12 per cent, the Australian Capital Territory 6 per cent, Western Australia 9 per cent, South Australia 6 per cent and Tasmania and the Northern Territory each has 2 per cent.
- Unemployment among librarians is low at 2 per cent compared to the Australian average of 5 per cent. Overall job growth has been positive over the past five years (2 per cent per year), especially in the past two years.
- Job prospects are rated “average” for librarians and library technicians, “good” for archivists and intelligence professionals and “below average” for library assistants.
- Library workers rank in the seventh decile for “employment in growth industries”. This means an above average proportion works in sectors estimated to grow strongly in the foreseeable future.

**Why work overseas... motivational factors**

Given the relative good shape of the Australian sector, at least in terms of salary, employment levels and job growth, the obvious question is: why work overseas? Decisions by individuals to work overseas will necessarily be determined by an array of personal and professional motivations, well beyond the employment characteristics of particular professions/industries and employment markets, though these do provide useful background and context.

For some, just the opportunity to experience everyday life and work in another country, context and culture may be attractive enough to motivate a move to a different employer and country. In my case, this was partly true. Past positive experiences when visiting Canada helped to set a context for my decision to move. Canada, like Australia, is a large and diverse country, whose history and development has been influenced by distance, isolation and a sense of “can do” and relative independence of thought and action. Canada and Australia share some common heritage through their membership in the British Commonwealth and their shared experiences of democratic processes of
government. These factors helped to create a sense of safety and comfort; while some things would be different, others would be common.

I have to admit that while I was looking for a career move, I was not looking overseas. The opportunity presented itself, as did, in turn, the attraction of an overseas experience that eventually became a factor in my thinking.

For me, the challenge to work successfully and confidently in professional practice in another context and workplace culture was also a motivating factor. Australia’s workplace context and the culture of Australian university campuses have changed fundamentally during the last decade under the Howard Government. The higher education landscape post-1996 is littered with memorable moments and movements in public policy, all of which extracted a price from individuals in workplaces. Those who lived and worked through the institutional impacts of the “Vanstone cuts of 1996”, the various quality initiatives and the Nelson era of so-called “higher education reforms”, will understand this point. There is a certain attraction to returning to professional practice, where matters of service delivery, resource development and the quality of client interaction with the Library’s collections and its staff are what matters, rather than reporting to governments on compliance or otherwise with legislative requirements and/or government policy.

This factor became an attraction for me only after I was aware of the opportunity to work overseas. It was not a prime motivating factor which caused me to be responsive to a change employers and country.

Consequently, when presented with the opportunity to change employers and move country, different workplace contexts and cultures became one of the challenges and motivating factors. For example, the public policy and industrial context for Canadian universities is very different from those of their Australian counterparts. The challenge and opportunity to work in a Library that has a collegial environment, with high levels of unionization, provides a unique experience.

Australia long ago abandoned the practice of classifying librarians as academics/faculty and the notion that rank is attached to the individual librarian and not to the position the librarian holds, now seems foreign to most Australian practitioners (perhaps with the exception of one remaining Victorian institution and some very long serving librarians). The background and impact of this decision within Australian academic libraries is well beyond the scope of this paper, except to say that it warrants mention as the different context for librarians as faculty in Canada and the opportunity to work and lead in such an environment, was a motivating factor to accepting a senior leadership position in an academic library where scholarship and research is not only valued but are an expected part of the job and where the guarantee of tenure within the collegium provides some certainty for the later stages of one’s career.

Other motivational factors – the three employment drivers
At a more personal and professional level, questions of job readiness, job fit and satisfaction and, organisational culture fit were more fundamental in my decision to change employers. However, these questions came into sharp focus when the change also involved moving country, culture and context.
These questions, related and interconnected, are probably fundamental to any career move but for me they were fundamental and strong motivational factors. The key questions for employee and employer alike are:

- Can I/they do the job?
- Do I/they want the job?
- Will I/they “fit” the emerging organisational culture?

These three major employment drivers (for individuals and employers alike) come into play when individuals make a particular decision to change employer and when prospective employers makes a decision about who to employ.

The decision making processes which underpin the process of answering these three questions is complex because it involves not only the analysis of factual information but also involves some processing of emotions and the understanding of an individual’s perceptions about these questions.

Individuals being what they are, not all three questions would rank equally when career and employment decisions are made. Individuals may give a different ranking or weighting to some of the questions.

Generally all three broad themes would tend to rank equally in any career decision about employment options. However, I suspect that as one progresses through to managerial ranks to leadership positions, issues around the culture of the employing organisation might rank slightly above the other two – a matter which will be discussed later in this paper.

**Do I want the job?**
The answer to this question is likely to be driven by a number of competing factors and will vary among and between individuals. For some this might come down to lifestyle considerations, family responsibilities, financial considerations (including salary and conditions of employment), and preparedness to relocate. Individuals will place different emphasis on their personal assessment of these factors. A move overseas, while desirable and potentially exciting on the surface, may prove to be impractical for some, depending on their current circumstances and responsibilities.

The span of duties, levels of autonomy and other role expectations will also be part of the answer to this question. For example, the University of Saskatchewan was quite explicit in its advertisement for a Dean of the Library – the first ever Canadian academic library to appoint at this level. The institution made a conscious decision to seek a dean (not a library director) and this had attractions and was important to me in answering the question: Do I want the job?

**Can I do the job?**
In the course of a professional career, individuals acquire a mix of knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to ensure a satisfactory performance in library roles. Initial education and training, ongoing professional development, retraining and life experience contribute to the mix. Career decisions along the way become important components, if not in the present, then in the future.

Australian academic librarianship does not have a strong tradition of higher degree studies. By comparison, the North American experience mandates entry level to the
profession at the Master level. So the answer to this question regarding one’s capability to do the job is often dictated by decisions made earlier in one’s career. In my case the move to a new employer and country would have been most unlikely without my earlier decision to pursue and obtain doctoral qualifications, even though this decision was probably not critical if I continued my career within Australia.

One of the challenges when answering this question for oneself and for an overseas selection panel is comparability across systems, institutions and contexts. For example, is managing a budget in Australia the same as managing a budget in Canada – probably so. However, is experience and success in fund-raising and donor relationships the same – I suspect not, given that the context is different. Is managing and leading a large staff team the same? Maybe yes or maybe no. Some things will be the same but the context may be so significantly different that it will be difficult to judge if all knowledge, skills and abilities will be transportable.

How Search Committees/Selection Panels make such assessments are perhaps best known to them alone but regardless, these are all significant considerations when moving employers and countries.

**Will I fit the emerging organisational culture?**

Organizational culture has been described as the “personality of the organization” and it often manifests itself in the assumptions, values, norms and tangible signs (artifacts) of the organization’s members and their behaviors.

The answer to the question of will I/they fit the emerging organizational culture is a critical one. In a world of constant change it may often be difficult to get any real sense of what the culture of the organization is. Hence, the emphasis on the “emerging” component of the culture fit. There are some key indictors around emerging organizational cultures, which are worthy of consideration when thinking about changing employers and countries. For example, what is the organization’s mission, vision and values statement saying about the organization (do they have one?, what are the key leaders currently saying and doing and how does it sit with you?) Perhaps more importantly is the track record of the organization in delivering the reality (not just the rhetoric) of the values they articulate. This is where the fact finding and the decision-making about a move of employer and country gets to the pointy-end. It is also the point where a level of personal engagement becomes necessary rather than just fact-finding and reviewing documentation. Talking with people and using ones professional networks becomes critical at this stage.

In my case, finding the answer to this question and being comfortable that I had the true picture was helped enormously by a very well-organized site visit, which was part of the recruitment process. It was an exhausting experiencing, involving over 27 hours of international air travel for each of the forward and return journey, a week of meetings, presentations, discussions, a formal interview and a lot of preparatory ground-work in advance (and continuing to fulfill the requirements of a very demanding current job). This part of the process of deciding to move employer and country should not be undertaken lightly! In my case, the process was very public and very open and gave both me and my perspective employer the chance to address the question around “fit” with organizational culture. As I write this part of the article some eight months into my change of employer and country, I am extremely pleased to report my assessment of my fit with the emerging organizational culture was correct.
Miscellaneous impacts
Regardless of the motivational factors impacting the choices individuals make about their careers, there are some emerging environments and contextual factors, which make moving to a new employer and a new country more accessible than ever before.

Primary among them is the impact of information and communication technology (ICT). The way people interact, learn and work has been radically changed by modern and emerging forms of electronic communication and the internet and libraries world-wide have been at that forefront of that revolution. Academic libraries have been the leaders in the adoption of new systems, processes and technologies and have been active in their professional participation in networks, e-research and e-collaborations. Librarians are experienced users of the Internet for collaboration across international boundaries.

New technologies have helped to break down traditional boundaries and barriers between locations and communities. Technology has changed our communication patterns, hastened the pace at which information is exchanged and brought us closer together by reducing the impact of time zones and making it possible to “do business, twenty-four by seven”. In turn these impacts have freed-up the employment market and made it easier to plan, manage and transact the business of moving from one employer to another and one country to another.

For example, an increasing amount of recruitment is being done across the Internet. While job postings on the Internet have been common for sometime, there is a growing tendency for information about job vacancies to be shared between and across professional networks through list serves and personal email. The rise of the Search Firms (or Head-hunters) and the expanded role they are now playing in recruitment, especially for senior library leadership positions, further highlights the importance and value of professional networks as firms seek a competitive edge by identifying new and potentially different candidates.

New technologies make it possible to move some way down the recruitment process before the need for any face-to-face communication, with the use of teleconferencing and video links opening up all kinds of possibilities. Significant amounts of the recruitment process, including the exchange of key documentation is now possible through the Internet.

Additionally, the amount of country and background information now available through the Internet is truly amazing. For example, information about immigration requirements, how to move yourself, your belongings and your family pet from country to country is now available quickly and easily. The quality and the quantity of information available through the Australian Government website are particularly extensive and easy to access.

The business of moving from one country to another is complex. Examples of how technology helped in my case included the entire process of gathering of quotes and developing the removal plan with the Canadian-based removal company, including right up to the stage of the removal truck arriving at the front door to pack and load household belongs (and the family pet dog) for shipment to Canada, was transacted by email.

Further on in the moving process, ICT makes keeping in touch with family and friends across the globe both cost effective and efficient. It also helps to maintain your country perspective. For example, Internet access allows me to connect with Australian
newspapers and news services – 24 hours a day, seven days per week. This means being able to keep up-to-date with happenings in Australia, from an Australian perspective. It also gives you an Australian perspective on world events. For example, the situation in the Middle East, while reported in Canada, received a different news focus through the Australian media.

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Getting practical
Moving employer and country may not be for everyone. If it is for you, the following advice might be helpful. Be practical and realistic in your expectation. For example, when I assumed my new employer would provide me with a car because that is how it is in Australia, I was told that “not even the University President has a car provided”!

Finalising the employment conditions may take some time as variations between employers and countries will be different and assessing the comparative advantages/disadvantages may be complex. There are some good economic advisory tools (such as cross-country, cross-city, cost-of-living comparisons) available to help in this respect.

Also, be patient about the proper processes regarding the immediate change of leaving your current employer and your country. Treat it as a process, which you start and progressively work through. Realise that you are dependant upon others to complete the process and the paperwork necessary for a change of employer and a change of country. Write a list of everything you need to do, keep it in one place (I had a moving book), tick it off and don’t leave your current employer and/or your country before you have done everything on the list.

Make sure you have:

- Personal documentation (original and certified copies), not just your passport, with you when you move. Carry documents with you and do not allocate them to your removalist to ship. Assembling (or reassembling) these from a distance can be time consuming and expensive.

- Essential account numbers and passwords. In an age of digital communication, remember the advice about writing down such numbers; but also remember you will be acquiring a whole new range of numbers. Although you think you will remember them all, chances are that you will not, particularly given all that is happening in your life.

- Clear and accurate information about your status and entitlements with your new employer and in your new country.

- Put all your personal affairs in order before you leave your country. Be sure you have made your wishes known in respect to your personal affairs.

- Left someone in your county of origin authorised to deal with your affairs and to be a point of contact.

- Appropriate, robust and mobile communication technologies in place as they become critical practical and emotional supports for staying in touch and transacting business.

- A world-clock with you and that you leave one with your immediate family and contacts.
Some memories/souvenirs or special objects of home with you, even if you do not think you will need them, as it maybe sometime before you are reunited with your household belongings.

• Learn some basic facts about your new employer and your new country, especially about the area where you plan to live.

**Emerging personal impressions**

No amount of research, dreaming or speculation ever really prepares one for the transition from one employer to another, let alone from one country to another. While there will be many things familiar, there will also be a vast array of new experiences and new contexts. There will be days when this is exciting and exhilarating. At other times, such experiences will be down-right draining on your emotions.

Some highlights and/or memorable moments for me follow

Shortly after my arrival in Canada, I attended a joint meeting of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), held in the national capital of Ottawa. The meeting coincided with the visit to Canada by Australian Prime Minister, John Howard and his wife, Janette. Ottawa’s streets around Parliament House were filled with Australian and Canadian flags. The professional meeting was held in the same hotel where the Prime Minster (and his entourage) was staying. It was very interesting to see how my new country viewed my home country and its leader.

Combined CARL and ARL have a membership which includes the top research libraries in Canada and the United States of America (USA) and there were over 150 delegates in attendance at the Ottawa meeting. While the meeting provided very useful context, it also reinforced for me early on, that the issues of academic librarianship are global issues. I recall thinking to myself during a quite moment in the meeting, if I closed my eyes and ignored the accents, I could be at a CAUL meeting where issues around scholarly communication, e-learning, copyright and public policy and consortium purchasing were high on the discussion agenda. While context was somewhat different, the broader issues are the same.

Among other earlier experiences are several around the power and use of language, especially in different locations and contexts. What you may take for granted may well be foreign or misunderstood by others. Again, context is critical. For example over the years I have attended many University Convocation ceremonies as graduations are one of the key milestones in the lifecycle of any student and any University. Indeed, in my immediate past position graduations (and many other student services) were part of my Portfolio responsibilities. I have always tried to attend and participate in graduations and I hope to continue the practice in Canada. At my first ceremony, exactly one month after my arrival in country, I rose, as instructed by the Master of Ceremonies for the singing (and signing) of the National Anthem, complete with live orchestra and lead singer. I rose, removed my head gear as dedicated by protocol and prepared to sing “Advance Australia Fair”, only to hear the words and sound of “Oh Canada” – a timely and sobering reminder that I was a long way from home.

Hearing new words being used for the first time is also a reminder that while we may all think we speak the Queen’s English we do use language (and some words, in particular) in different ways. I quickly realised when confronted by blank looks from
Library staff that my use of the word “fortnight” was not appropriate, mainly because no-one knew what I was talking about. Just as we get paid monthly here, was all I could think in reply.

Summer in Australia has always been a special time – the smell of freshly mown lawn, cricket in the back yard, summer sports on TV and hot weather. While Canada is not big on cricket it plays other sports, such as hockey and curling, to the same level of intensity and with similar levels of passion and patriotism. However, learning new sports’ rules, while experiencing summer smells and weather in July (as opposed to December) took some getting use to. At the time of writing I am awaiting my first white Christmas.

Learning to work, manage and lead in the context of a different employer, in a different country and with very different labour relations and industrial context has been a real learning-curve. Three separate collective agreements covering a library staff of approximately 160 is interesting and very different from the Australian context. Coming to fully understand the various collegial processes associated with staff reviews for tenure, probation and salary increments may take a little time, patience and practice.

Concluding comments
The move to Canada is my first-time experience of living and working for an extended period outside of Australia. The early drafts of this article were prepared before the move and the completed article finalised after some four months with the new employer, in the new country. As such it had been very difficult to pin-down the final focus for the article, which, at times, has been a bit of a moving landscape, due to the sheer size and scale of the whole experience.

It has been a huge and positive experience thus far and I am pleased to say, at this stage, a move of employer and country is one I would recommend to others.

References


Further reading


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Managing libraries overseas: some challenges and opportunities

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to set out to give a personal view of potential opportunities and challenges to be considered when taking up senior managerial posts in libraries overseas.

Design/methodology/approach – The findings and recommendations in the paper are based solely on personal experience of positions in Germany and The Netherlands. Personal and professional issues are discussed as well as formal considerations and possible cultural differences.

Findings – The paper makes a number of recommendations and stresses the importance of agreeing on key issues/parameters with overseas employers in advance of signing a contract. The paper affirms the value – to both parties – of a library manager from one country taking up a senior post in another.

Originality/value – Based on personal experience, the paper provides practical guidance for those considering applications for senior management posts in libraries overseas.

Keywords Libraries, Library management, Employment, Contracts

Paper type Viewpoint

1. Introduction and background

This short paper gathers together my thoughts on several years spent in a number of library positions outside the UK and provides some practical tips. Needless to say, I will not make many specific reference to the institutions for which I have previously worked at home or overseas. I have profited enormously both personally and professionally from all my posts – without exception – and I hope I have made a positive contribution to each of them.

I should like to preface my remarks by describing briefly what my experience has been in terms of postings. My professional background is fairly conventional for a British librarian of my age and background: a first degree (in English), a post-graduate diploma and early work experience in London. My professional experience overseas has been confined to two countries within the European Union: Germany and the Netherlands. During my career I have focused on special collections (particularly early printed books) but I was also involved in early digital library developments. In the 1980s I worked on a bibliographical research project at a German university. In the 1990s I worked my way up the management ladder at the British Library. Since 2001 I have been working in senior managerial positions in Germany and the Netherlands. I took up my current post as director of Nijmegen University Library in 2005. I would probably describe the current focus of my work as change management, in other words my current work resembles that of senior librarians in most countries nowadays.

Like most people’s, my career (including the time I have spent overseas) has not always “run to plan”. Unexpected opportunities have opened up, but I have also...
encountered unplanned difficulties. I am not sure, however, that I would have made significantly different career choices with the knowledge I now have, although – obviously – the choices I made would have been better informed. I would certainly have been more aware of particular issues and specific challenges and presumably been better able to deal with them as they arose.

Moving from one country to work in another might be beneficial to all the parties concerned, but it also presents a number of challenges that need to be honestly and openly addressed. These challenges might be brought together under the loose headings of “personal”, “professional” and “cultural” (or perhaps also “structural”). Under each I have included some basic survival tips for library and information managers working overseas.

2. Personal factors
One obvious impediment to moves overseas has been the depressing British tradition of obstinate mono-lingualism. In comparison with managers in industry and commerce, British library managers working overseas cannot expect colleagues and staff to switch to English as a matter of course. A reasonable knowledge of the language of the other country is clearly an essential prerequisite for operating effectively in any library organisation. Managers will need to be able to communicate with staff at all levels. The relative lack of interest in foreign languages among students and the UK population in general must be regarded as the main impediment to cross-border working. That being said, there are examples where language skills can be acquired in post. In the Netherlands, for example, employers are used to investing in language acquisition by English-speaking foreigners; they are aware that few English-speakers applying for posts will have any existing knowledge of Dutch. My own foreign-language background is, as readers will have inferred, German, and my current employer has generously supported my acquiring Dutch while in post. (I shall leave comments on my progress to others!) If you do not already speak the language fluently, ensure you have agreed a strategy with your employer on how you will progress. Unless you have lived and worked in a country for many years, it is unlikely that you will be able produce written work to a standard expected of senior managers who are native speakers. Ensure that this is acknowledged within your organisation, and that you make arrangements to have your prose drafts checked or turned into formal letters and documents, arrangements that will probably involve your office or personal staff.

New employees from overseas are inevitably confronted with unfamiliar contractual arrangements and fiscal and social security systems that will need to be tackled before or in the first weeks of taking up a post, and very possibly before language skills have been honed. They will also need to sort out banking, health insurance and housing issues. The amount of time this will need in terms of visiting offices and filling in forms should not be underestimated. There are few up-to-date guides to these issues and many of those that have been published in recent years are positively misleading (at least those I have seen for the Netherlands!). Newly arrived managers will need to devote a considerable amount of time to such personal and practical points during office hours in their first few weeks and months. The level of support they receive from personnel departments and personal assistants in sorting out such problems is surely a measure of the quality of an organisation as an employer.
It is clearly important to establish what the level of support will be before accepting a post in order to eliminate misunderstandings. If a personnel department has given little thought to these issues or seems to think its role in your appointment largely consists of requiring you to fill in forms, this is likely to reflect badly on the organisation as a whole.

 Needless to say, you may find yourself for long periods of time in “unfamiliar territory” without easy access to family or networks of friends. Well in advance of accepting a job, you should think through how you will deal with regular long-distance commuting and/or how you are likely to cope in a personal emergency.

3. Professional and management issues
It is essential to establish with your employer precisely what is expected of you – and also what cannot be expected. Ensure that you agree a precise set of aims and objectives with specific goals and milestones. If this way of working is unfamiliar to the employer (not an unrealistic assumption in some countries), explain that you feel uncomfortable with a lack of clarity about what is expected of you. Ensure that a record is made of any agreement, even if you have to make informal notes yourself. Insist on some form of regular feedback opportunity. You should consider, however, that working in this way may well be unfamiliar in the country you are working in; naturally you should not insist on the full panoply of formal contacts you might expect in a UK context. Mutual respect and trust are clearly important, but the opportunities for cross-cultural “misunderstandings” are considerable, so that some form of mechanism for avoiding them is essential.

In this process, you should also make clear what cannot be expected of you. Indeed, this should be made apparent at interview stage (too often it is not). No serious organisation should hire someone from overseas and expect them immediately to be able to manage the full range of financial or human resource issues where knowledge of local traditions and practice would be required. If the organisation places you in a position where you are expected to deal with such issues without a background in, and experience of, policy and practice in the country concerned, it’s probably best to look for another job! Above all, make sure you have a network of support and advice on such issues and that you can delegate where it is appropriate to do so.

Before you start a job, it might be useful to work through various scenarios. You will probably have a set of assumptions about the role and function of a senior manager in any given organisation. These assumptions may not help you, however, in a senior post in another country. For example, if your initial analysis is that some form of new organisational structure – or organisational change – might be necessary, find out if and how this might be achieved. You might discover too late that changes in organisational structures or in relation to senior personnel are extremely difficult to achieve within the local legal framework.

Staff may have difficulties with personal style or at least with expectations and assumptions about what a senior manager does. In some instances, staff may make assumptions about modes of direction and/or delegation that would be surprising to a modern British manager. Some staff might feel more comfortable with a more “directive” style than would be usual in the UK today. It is important to discuss these issues openly and to ask for feedback. Staff and colleagues should be aware, however, that differences in style are inevitable if a manager comes from overseas. It may well be
difficult to get the balance right between formality and informality. In Germany, for example, a more formal tone is usually expected in everyday transactions between staff and colleagues than would now be usual in Britain or the Netherlands. In the Netherlands the tone might well be unexpectedly direct. The new entrant should not feel the need to adapt to every nuance in the overseas context; after all, you are probably being hired because you are different! But there should always be opportunities to discuss any issues openly.

Any senior librarian works within a network of professional contacts and here the newcomer from overseas is likely to find him or herself at an immediate disadvantage by not sharing a similar background and experience to colleagues inside or outside the library. The key here, of course, is to stress a shared professionalism (i.e. librarianship) and common professional values. There is a danger that the overseas manager will make too frequent reference to personal experience (for example, in the UK) which might then be interpreted as criticism – or at least an unfavourable comparison – with the local situation. It is probably advisable to keep the number of such references to a minimum or at least to make clear their relevance in a specific context. Over time, librarians from overseas will build up their own store of local references and common experience which they can share with staff and colleagues.

4. “Cultural” differences

Although within the European Union, equivalent professional qualifications are now supposed to be recognized across borders, problems clearly remain. In Britain this seems to be less of an issue than in some other countries which have an unfortunate tradition, for example, of using academic and professional qualifications to restrict entry to professions by foreign nationals. The secondary, tertiary and professional education systems of the English-speaking world contrast quite strongly with traditions on the continent. Employers may well be puzzled by A-levels, surprised that first degrees in the UK can be gained in “only” three of four years, and so on. Until quite recently, Germans tended to assume their educational system delivered better-qualified graduates than those of other countries. If this view is no longer sustainable, not least in view of some recent international comparative studies, then old attitudes tend to die hard. I do not think differences in formal qualifications need disturb anyone very much. But if your employers’ personnel department, for example, makes unreasonable requests about equivalent UK qualifications based on strictly local assumptions, they clearly have not thought through issues relating to the employment of an overseas manager. My advice would be to check the formal position carefully (perhaps by taking legal advice) and to treat a prospective employer who does this sort of thing with caution.

In any country, terms and conditions of employment are regulated by legislation, but some countries are more “legalistic” – and litigious – than others. This might explain, for example, why in some countries, HR departments will be more focused on contractual and legal matters (and less on strictly HR matters) than would normally be the case in the UK. In some countries it would not be unusual for an HR manager him or herself to be a lawyer. Not least for this reason, it may be a good idea to seek a legal opinion before signing a contract. Even if this is not considered necessary, then asking a senior colleague from the country concerned to give an opinion about a draft contract is surely good advice.
Balancing expectations is clearly important. Job opportunities overseas may seem attractive but a realistic assessment of pros and cons needs to be made and applicants should ensure that no surprises are lurking in the small print. As differentials between senior and middle managers tend to be much smaller in Europe outside the UK (and tax levels and social security costs are generally higher), it is unlikely that many applicants will be moving abroad in order to achieve higher salaries. Nevertheless these issues need to be considered carefully if managers from overseas are not to left with a feeling of being “shortchanged”, for example by taxation systems. This is probably not the place to go into very much detail about salaries and taxation, but again the way that an organisation handles these issues and advises applicants about them is likely to reflect on its quality as an employer.

5. Some conclusions

As far as I am aware there are rather few direct parallels with my personal experience of working overseas. There are currently two British university librarians based in the Netherlands (and two Belgians – out of a total of 12 Dutch university libraries, as well as one British director of a Belgian university library), but currently no British librarians in senior posts in Germany. A glance through a history of the British Library and its predecessors over the last three centuries will soon bring to light a large number of German and other foreign-born staff, some in very senior positions[1], whereas German libraries generally remain a “closed book” for British librarians. I consider this state of affairs to be highly unfortunate.

Libraries – like individuals – can profit enormously from exchanges across national and linguistic boundaries, from new perspectives and contrasting professional experience. Within the European Union, as labour markets are (gradually) becoming more flexible and professional qualifications gained in one country are (theoretically) accepted in another, one could reasonably hope for a better balance. This situation is especially curious at a time when senior German librarians, for example, are complaining about a perceived dearth of good library managers or librarians with management potential. Perhaps there needs to be more careful thought (by both employers and by potential employees) on the challenges involved in cross-boundary moves in libraries. A great deal of traditional thinking, preconceived ideas, and perhaps some restrictive practices, may need to be jettisoned along the way.

Finally, let me sum up some of the tips I have made based on my own experience:

• Agree a strategy with your employer on learning the language to the appropriate standard.
• Ensure your new organisation will give you adequate advice and practical support as you make the transition.
• Think through in advance of accepting a job how you are likely to cope with living away from family and friends.
• Agree clear aims and objectives with your employer and make a record, even if this is not the usual local practice.
• Make clear in discussion with your employer what you cannot be expected to do. Agree strategies for dealing with these points.
Work through various scenarios before you start the job: will your managerial experience be useful or appropriate in the overseas context? If not, how will you (and/or the organisation) deal with these issues?

Discuss matters of personal or working style openly with colleagues and staff, but do not try to adapt to every nuance of local style!

Avoid making professional experience in the UK your exclusive point of reference.

Ensure that the organisation is not going apply restrictive practices, e.g. with relation to your academic or professional qualifications.

Have your contract checked by a lawyer or someone with relevant local experience.

Look carefully at the issues of salary, insurance, taxation, pensions, etc. Ensure there is a balance between the benefits of the experience you will be getting by working overseas and the rewards and sacrifices it might entail.

I suppose the essential point is: make sure the organisation hiring you is aware of the special issues of integrating a manager from overseas and has thought through ways of dealing with them. I am pleased to be able say that I would give my current employer (Radboud University Nijmegen) high marks in this regard!

Note
1. A pattern also discernible in most other British academic libraries.

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Managing across cultures: the experiences of three Hong Kong academic library directors

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to present the experiences of three western librarians in adapting their management styles for working and living in a new culture.

Design/methodology/approach – Three university library directors who have been working as expatriates in Hong Kong for 2 to 18 years were asked to comment on their own personal experiences in moving to a new culture, a new language environment, and new management challenges.

Findings – Moving to a new culture can be difficult for the expatriate and his family but work environments have many similarities. Developing an understanding of the local professional culture and working within is vital to success.

Practical implications – The paper presents some guidelines for librarians who may be seeking a career abroad.

Originality/value – There is very little literature on librarians, particularly those in management, who have chosen to continue their careers abroad. This paper provides first-hand experiences and demonstrates that librarianship shares a certain commonality and that management skills can be adapted to new cultures.

Keywords Librarians, Library management, Hong Kong, China, Management styles, National cultures

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

What is it like working abroad as a professional academic librarian? Given the trends in globalization, are professional library skills fully transferable? What cultural challenges await the expatriate librarian? In this article, three academic librarians – one American, one American/Irish and one British, all with English as their mother tongue – discuss the pitfalls and rewards of working abroad for an extended period of time[1], with particular reference to one place: the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), ranked 66th in the world as a working environment for European expatriates[2]. While acknowledging that the HKSAR has its own unique working culture and work ethic, and noting the dangers of generalizing about over six million Hong Kong people, the authors nevertheless draw some generally applicable conclusions about the professional academic librarian abroad.
Where we came from

(a) Tony
I got involved with China eight years before becoming a professional librarian. I went to Taiwan in 1964 after taking Chinese on a whim as a freshman. After two and a half years of being a missionary and learning the language I returned to the States getting BA and MA degrees in political science but specializing in Chinese studies before going to library school at the University of Washington. I spent a number of years doing Asian Studies library work before moving on to collection development generally with administrative posts at Brigham Young, Texas A&M, and Columbia Universities. After ten years in New York I decided to get an EdD degree at Columbia Teachers College with a focus on comparative education. This brought me back to China when doing my fieldwork for a dissertation on the library and information needs of distance education students in that country. In 2001 I turned in my dissertation on a Friday and left for Hong Kong to take up my current post as Librarian the following Monday.

(b) Frederick
After managing and owning a bookstore in Manhattan, I worked as an acquisitions manager at the Research Libraries of the New York Public Library for seven years before taking a similar position at Columbia University where I received my Masters of Science in Library Service. My professional experience includes corporate libraries, managing a special library on human sexuality, and directing small university libraries in New York and New Jersey. I also worked in the further education system in south London for four years, serving as College Librarian and Systems Librarian. In December 2004, I took up my new duties as University Librarian at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. I am currently finishing a doctorate at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth on the economics of late 19th century publishing.

(c) Colin
After my first degree in Chinese Studies in 1970, I became a professional librarian and have since spent my whole career in academic libraries, initially in England. I maintained my interest in China by pursuing part-time research, resulting in an MPhil degree at the University of East Anglia on Shanghai during the Great Leap Forward, and finally a PhD at the University of Hong Kong on information flow and freedom of information in libraries in mainland China. In 1988, at the age of forty, I achieved a long-standing ambition to work in China and became Head of Technical Services at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I moved to the position of University Librarian of The Chinese University of Hong Kong in October 2000.

Part one: personal experiences
Why did we accept positions abroad? Have our experiences been positive?

(a) Tony. From the day I left Taiwan in 1967, I had a desire to work in China, but the opportunity did not present itself until thirty-four years later. China’s history, culture, and language hook some foreigners and that was my experience. But with a wife and six children to support on a young librarian’s salary, I did not feel I could indulge my personal passion for all things Chinese. When we only had three children I taught in Taiwan for a year but I always supposed that it would not be until after retirement, and the children were on their own, that I could work in China. But in 1999, when I needed
to talk to an old friend of mine in Hong Kong about a daughter’s China visa problems, I had the opportunity to ask about a job opening at the University of Hong Kong. I was concerned that they would not want to hire a foreigner, particularly since I did not speak the Cantonese dialect. She reassured me that foreigners were welcome and that most staff members and students could speak English in any case. In many ways I feel that my sixteen years of working in Manhattan prepared me for life in Hong Kong. Like New York, most walk fast and work hard. My experience has been very positive. My staff were ready for change and we have been running full speed for the past five years. My wife is very comfortable here as well. She only needs to speak a little Chinese and Hong Kong is such a cosmopolitan city that we can enjoy eastern and western culture equally well.

(b) Frederick. I took my first assignment abroad because I had dual citizenship and was able to move to Europe when my wife needed to be abroad to do her doctoral research. I moved to the HKSAR simply because I was ready to make a change and the salary, climate and chance for adventure were attractive. Like my colleagues, I was hired for my background and enthusiasm for the position and not because I had any experience with Chinese language and culture.

Adapting to Hong Kong has not been too difficult for us: we were used to living and working in multi-ethnic environments in New York and London and we had some experience with Chinese culture from friends in New York and from living near Chinatown. On arriving in Hong Kong we found other friends of ours had also moved here, so we had a ready-made social network. My wife was also able to secure a position in her field within weeks of arriving, making the transition very easy for both of us.

(c) Colin. I had worked in academic libraries in UK for twenty years and tried once or twice to get a job in the Far East. Because of my Chinese Studies background, the decision to accept an offer of a post in Hong Kong was an easy one for me. It was a long-held ambition which my family understood and followed. Once I accepted a renewal of my Hong Kong contract two years later, I felt I had definitely “burnt my boats” as far as ever resuming my career in UK on the same grade was concerned.

It is very important for the family to be settled: the children in education; the spouse in a continuation of his/her career. Difficulties in these area are the prime cause for a professional’s early departure. My two children were eight and five years old. Initially, my wife was not interested in pursuing her career in Hong Kong, but she did eventually teach at another local university. We feel that working in the HKSAR can be a real pleasure, though in our first summer months of acclimatizing here, we found the place very hot and very steamy. This does take some getting used to if you are from the UK. Air-conditioning, dehumidifiers and other unforeseen expenses took their toll on our wallets – financially, the initial move took a long time to recover from. Psychologically, being part of a minority population in the HKSAR in terms of appearance, language and culture, did take my family a little time to get used to, but we have never ever been subject to any kind of serious or overt discrimination.

I was emphatically not hired for my ability in Chinese; I was hired as a professional librarian with experience in systems, though my interest in China helped. As far as work is concerned, for Hong Kong people, it is very simple: if you have the expertise and you are willing to work hard, you are accepted. In the HKSAR, no one ever asked us why we were here (though my family and I often asked ourselves that same question).
Differences in libraries between our home and adopted countries

(a) Tony. First off I need to say that I believe libraries in America and Hong Kong are more alike than different. Universities and their libraries the world over share the same ancestry: the English college, the German university, and more recently the American university which shares characteristics of both.

My own university was founded by the British nearly one hundred years ago. Nevertheless, in terms of the library’s organization, services, and collections it is almost indistinguishable from a university library in North America. We are a contributing member of OCLC, we use the Innovative integrated library system, we are members of the Center for Research Libraries, we subscribe to 30,000 + e-journals and have a million plus e-books, and we participate in the RAPID accelerated document delivery system. We are just beginning to establish an institutional repository and have jumped onto the information commons bandwagon. Collaboratively, library life in Hong Kong is also quite similar to that of North America. My university participates in a cooperative with most of our electronic sources of information obtained through joint license agreements. Our cooperative recently established an InnReach user initiated document delivery system and we are planning to build a joint storage repository.

What are most different in my view are the differences in the set of demands placed upon us by the educational system. The older British educational system seems to emphasize testing more than the American model. While a few programs have converted to the American style four-year curriculum with its already dominating use of problem-based learning, most have not. As a consequence our undergraduate students do not need the library as much for research support as do their North American counterparts. But they do rely heavily upon us as a place for study, especially those living in relatively small apartments who need more space and easy access to the campus backbone, the Web, to photocopy machines and printers.

Having said that, just as American undergraduates increasingly go to the Web before they resort to their library, Hong Kong students seem to be much the same. Graduate education, on the other hand, is different with both research post graduate and taught post graduate programs. The former system pushes students into the library with greater intensity that I was used to while the latter results in library demands from graduate students like in North America.

(b) Frederick. Hong Kong follows the British model in its academic structure and so is much more structured than in the USA, with intake quotas and less flexibility. Funding is provided by the government and, while there were some recent and severe cutbacks, fairly generous. Service expectations vary greatly between the three countries. There was much less expectation of service on the part of students in England and budgets were a fraction of those of USA and Hong Kong, as were salaries. While students in the USA have a high expectation of service, their actual use of the library is much less than in Hong Kong, where the culture values hard work and study and students flood into the library on the first day of classes. Book circulation here is many times greater than what it was at my similar-sized library in the USA.

Many Hong Kong librarians have been educated abroad and hold undergraduate and post-graduate degrees from English, Canadian, American, and Australian universities, which perhaps demonstrate the commonalities of librarianship. For most, librarianship has been their only career, while in the USA it was often the second. It is not uncommon to find clerical staff with or working towards undergraduate or
post-graduate degrees and many have taken courses to obtain certificate or higher qualifications in librarianship. I was recently able to fill two professional positions from members of my clerical staff who had completed their masters while working here. Not only is there more interest in the HKSAR in educational advancement, there are also a number of opportunities for training and education by the availability of part-time and distance learning programmes.

Lingnan University currently catalogues English-language books in Dewey and Chinese books in Lai, a specialized Chinese cataloguing system. We have just begun to reclassify both into LC and interfile them, which should encourage our students, who are bi-literate, to make more use of English-language books. I have also come to realize that Chinese texts present problems that do not exist with Western texts: two different character sets, the traditional one used in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the simplified one on the mainland; the filing complexities of a non-alphabetic system; various transcription systems, especially for Cantonese; and the problems of displaying Chinese on a computer screen have all come forcibly to my attention in the past year.

(c) Colin. Coming from the UK, and with Hong Kong’s UK colonial ties, the transition from one library to another was an easy one. The organizational and committee structure for universities and higher education in general were recognizably “British” and fairly easy to slot into in both the libraries I have worked in here. Once I walked into my workplace – first at a polytechnic and then at a collegiate university – I could have been in any academic library in England. HKSAR academic libraries generally have a technical/public/systems services divisional structure. Usually, about 60 percent of library materials are in English, catalogued to world MARC standards, and shelved by LC or Dewey. The student undergraduate and postgraduate curricula are standard and recognizable in UK terms, with many courses taught in English. The major differences I perceived relate to funding. For most of my career in the HKSAR, university libraries have been more than adequately funded. For my library to be able to afford to stay state-of-the-art is a wholly new experience for me. When the HKSAR economy did take a downturn after 1997, my UK experience in successive funding cuts and staffing reductions proved useful. In short, professionally-speaking at least, I have always felt I have fitted right in.

Cultural and language differences
(a) Tony. As already noted, Hong Kong is a very cosmopolitan place with all sorts of cultures living along side each other. On the one hand this is wonderful. If my wife and I want to pretend we are back in the States we can go eat at a Ruby Tuesday restaurant or an Italian-American eatery, go to a recent American movie (the most violent or sexually explicit ones are not shown or last only a short time), and then finish off the night with ice cream at Baskin-Robins. What is nice about Hong Kong is you can do most of these same activities but in their northern or southern Chinese, Japanese, Thai, or European, etc., versions. On the other hand, the complexity of cultures can be a bit chaotic. We celebrate everyone’s holidays: Buddha’s birthday, Christmas, Easter, a couple of days devoted to cleaning the graves of ancestors, the Autumn Moon Festival, several patriotic holidays, etc., sixteen in all. Consequently, I find that there is a lot of tolerance amongst all the groups who live here.

Language wise, Hong Kong has proven easy for both my wife and I. All of my professional librarians have library degrees from North America, the UK, or Australia...
and their English is excellent. Communication with the support staff can be a bit more adventurous when I resort to Mandarin Chinese, especially since we are both speaking a second language. 

(b) Frederick. Before moving to London I watched the East Enders twice a week for two months. On my first day on the job in south London, someone came up to the desk and asked for a ball-point pen, at which point I learned a new word: “biro”. But at least I could read English, even if what I was hearing was a new language. My biggest distress here is being illiterate in Chinese. Learning is slow, but I feel a bit of triumph every time I can read a bus sign or recognize a character on a menu. While English is the language of instruction and for most, but by no means all, university meetings and announcements, the local spoken Cantonese dialect is otherwise universal and does pose a barrier in communicating with the very many people in Hong Kong who have little, if any, English.

Having been in the Peace Corps I learned to be aware of cultural subtleties and to listen, watch, learn, and adapt. Having grown up in the conservative culture of the 1950s, it made it easier to adapt to the more conservative culture of the East. Life here is lived with more ritual and formality than in the West, and you find a consistency that can be either comforting or alarming: social affairs in which almost everyone, male and female, is in a black suit, formal banquets, the presentation of souvenirs to speakers, the order of procession through doorways, the sudden conclusion of a banquet as the host rises and all leave together. The seriousness of the students, in their suits and flawless manner as they escort guests around campus is all offset by being surrounded by the most good-natured, happy, and conscientious people I have ever met; while Cantonese is not a soft language, I have yet to hear a harsh word spoken on the campus or on the street. I do not miss New York.

(c) Colin. Given the tri-lingual abilities of my professional colleagues (two Chinese spoken dialects, Mandarin and Cantonese, plus English), meetings are minuted in English and if an expatriate is present, conducted in English. It is an easy environment for the English-speaking expatriate in this sense. No one expects the expatriate to speak Chinese in Hong Kong – a testimony to the difficulty of the locally spoken Cantonese dialect, and to the laziness of foreigners. This is not the case on the Mainland, where the Chinese now have a distinct preference for conducting meetings in Mandarin. Speaking some Mandarin is becoming more essential every day in the HKSAR and the region. It is also important to note that, if you are working in English, you are working in your local colleagues’ second language. Full and instant understanding of what is said or written cannot be taken for granted. For example, Chinese people count large numbers in blocks of 10,000, so their comprehension of a figure (say, “345,000” spoken in English) may not be instant. Their writing skills in English vary widely, so expatriates need to be prepared for a great deal of editing work of what is rather rudely called “Chinglish” – English with Chinese grammar.

As far as informal ties are concerned, it is highly unlikely that expatriates will see very much of their colleagues outside the workplace[3]. Lunches, and the delicate etiquette surrounding Chinese meals, are very important and frequent, but dinner and weekend meetings, especially in Chinese homes, are very rare. Chinese colleagues have many obligations to fulfil towards their extended families, which give them very little time for much else. For many there are strong Christian beliefs making Sunday mornings sacrosanct. The culture of alcohol drinking away from the dinner table is almost non-existent amongst local Chinese.
Differences in our management style and in Hong Kong staff attitudes

(a) Tony. Again I have to start by qualifying my answer and point out that just as not all Americans are alike, nor are Chinese people. So, making generalizations on differences in how staff perceive or embrace different management styles is quite difficult. Yet, it has been my observation that North Americans and about everyone else on the planet deals with problems differently. Many contemporary North American managers want to attack problems head on, to talk to through problems with everyone involved, to freely admit wrong doing, to forgive and forget, etc. The goal is to get the job done and getting everyone to buy into the solution. More traditional managers, Chinese included, do not see this direct style as productive. They do not want to needlessly involve too many people in the decision-making process. They also do not want to embarrass others by talking directly about problems in front of others since such talk might be construed as criticism and criticism forces others to be defensive at best and to retaliate at worst.

I think another difference deals with the issue of loyalty. A modern manager is loyal to the goals and objectives of a company or organization whereas the more traditional manager is loyal to his or her staff, almost irrespective of the consequences to the organization. Another difference is one’s attitude to change. Many North Americans, I think, wake up in the morning believing that change is good, that unless an organization is always transforming itself to match changes in the environment it is doomed. More traditional managers definitely practice the “if it isn’t broke, don’t fix it” management style. This style is of course not just practiced by that segment of Chinese managers who are more traditional, but it has been my experience that most appreciate this point of view more than I do.

(b) Frederick. I have always characterized my management style is something like that of the commanding officers in the USA television series MASH: I work with professionals and feel that my job is to give them the freedom and resources to do their jobs. Networks are important, but in my previous jobs, turnover at the senior levels meant the network was often down, so I learned to find ways to initiate or complete projects with as much independence as possible. In the USA, my style was very direct and very informal. Abroad, it is much more collegial and much more formal. In Hong Kong I have informal bi-weekly meetings with senior staff and formal monthly meetings with other professional staff, similar to what I experienced in England.

In Hong Kong I work with and through my staff and to build a consensus for everything I want to do. The network here is strong and long lasting. So are my staff. They have all been here for ten years or more and have strong working relations with all of the other units on campus. When an outline is set for a project, everyone, professional and clerical, participates. That participation includes other units as well, all working not only to the outline but filling in the essential details and adding elaborations. Long hours are a given, although we may see the end of the statutory HKSAR six-day week this year.

In the USA, I had much more direct control. For example, when I extended the library hours from 9 p.m. to midnight, it was a matter of securing the provost’s support, adjusting the schedule and staffing, and posting the hours, I did not have to secure a consensus beforehand. While I had daily contact with my staff, formal meetings were held only if project-based. The library operated with a great deal of independence, and the Library Committee, which in theory had oversight of the library, was finally dissolved by the Senate after my second year. In Hong Kong, I have to work closely the
University’s senior management, working through a management committee composed of the University President, faculty, and senior department heads. In England, I had much less control as policies and funding would appear suddenly with the publication of the budget in November and we were suddenly sent off in new directions. In my four years there I was directed to physically rebuild the libraries five times, with little advance notice. In Hong Kong, we operate on a three-year budget cycle from our government funding source and make plans for five or ten years out, as we are currently doing for the change in 2012 to a four-year university degree, replacing the current three-year, British system now in place. We are also able to petition the government for additional funding for major projects, often successfully.

(c) Colin. I would largely concur with my colleagues opinions as expressed above. Many expatriates would categorize the working culture in the HKSAR as hierarchical and bureaucratic. If you are the boss, especially if you are older, expatriate and male, you will be given respect simply on those grounds. Chinese staff keep their heads down and avoid trouble; this sometimes means they avoid speaking out in front of colleagues in meetings. It is essential not to misunderstand such cultural signals. To be successful one must work hard to get to “yes” with all possible stakeholders, within and without the library. At The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the power and decision networks can be particularly subtle, and these are made more complex by a collegiate system. Three of the four Colleges and their libraries pre-date the foundation of the University and its Library in the 1960s. Those libraries still exist within the University Library System, and the three Colleges in question have a say in any major changes to them.

I find that my institution most definitely prefers evolutionary over revolutionary change. Like anywhere in the world, people not in the change loop will be reluctant to join later. I find I need to respectfully brief my university senior managers on important matters, and culturally, sometimes their definition of “important” may be very different from mine. Consensus-building coupled with conflict avoidance is particularly crucial here. All details of an initiative need to be worked out with great clarity with one’s colleagues at the outset. Once this is done, Hong Kong library staff will complete the task at least as accurately and quickly as anyone else in the world. Finally, though unions exist, they are not very active or very powerful. Hong Kong people will work all the hours that God sends if you ask them to. It should nevertheless be noted that the local working culture does indeed practice full equality of opportunity for the sexes, and adopts modern work-place laws.

Part two: general conclusions
What makes Hong Kong different?
Before making general observations on being an expatriate librarian anywhere, it would be useful to note what makes Hong Kong distinct from almost any other place. Its advantage is that it is a very advanced hi-tech city; with highly competent, educated, hard-working personnel (as noted, multiple degree-holders are common). A professional coming to the HKSAR for the first time should not be surprised at the technical sophistication of the workplace and the total adoption of global standards for doing business, including the management of academic libraries. Unlike many places in the world, Hong Kong works, like “…America works!” (Carter, 2000).

On the disadvantageous side, the differences after the “handover” to China have been more subtle and hardly noticeable in any normal working day, but they are
indeed wide-ranging on the political and economic front. HKSAR citizens enjoy western style freedoms of the press, speech, religion, expression, etc., but they are pressing the government for the right to elect their own Chief Executive and some feel they are controlled by the powers of the super rich tycoons who work with the government to keep order. In addition, the pollution from the Pearl River Delta is now having a serious effect on the desirability and advisability of relocating to the HKSAR. Language-wise, many believe there is a discernible decline in the standard of English and that Mandarin is becoming much more prevalent.

**What general observations can be made**

Here is a check-list of the considerations one should think about in working anywhere abroad.

**Practical differences.** Clearly, one needs to address the following basic questions and talk about these with family and colleagues before one makes any decision:

- Relocation of family: visas, work permits, spouse’s work, schooling, health insurance etc.
- Salary versus cost of living in chosen country.
- Conditions of service: passages home, medical benefits etc.
- Getting things done:, e.g. do the phone lines work?
- Going back eventually: organizing continuous home and financial/tax arrangements in one’s home country.
- Deciding if you will ever want to return back home to work. If so, keeping in touch with the job market back home is important: have you burnt your professional boats mid-career? Will anyone remember you? Do they think you are now from another planet? Will they think your experience abroad notable and worthwhile? Does the age/stage in career make a difference? Is it different for a younger and an older librarian? As Tilke remarks, “In terms of continuing professional and career development. . . it is useful for an international librarian to keep an eye on the situation ‘back home’.” (Tilke, 2000) This is an understatement. In truth, the longer the professional is away from home, the less likely he/she is able to rejoin the career ladder “back home” on the same rung or above.

**Cultural differences.** Culturally, just how different is the country you are going to, how much do you know about it and for how long are you going to relocate?

- Language, idioms, being understood/misunderstood.
- Food and diet.
- Status:, e.g. any discrimination on grounds of religion or sex?
- The working day:, e.g. siestas? Flextime? Unions?
- How important is networking? Do you need it to succeed? What new contacts are needed? It is our experiences that being “foreign” can initially help one in terms of having no history, no agenda and no bias at the workplace. Nevertheless, one needs allies, and these relationships will need to be forged carefully over the first few months. Going in “all guns blazing” is probably a bad idea anywhere – although it happens here as well as in other countries.
Professional differences. Here are a few examples of what may well be different or indeed the same in working in a library abroad:

- **Technical services.** Most countries will probably not follow the same standards as those from back home. We in Hong Kong are fortunate because we employ the MARC21 format but in this part of the world most nations have their own flavour.

- **Collection development.** The role of the librarian, for example, in collection development might vary considerably. While in large libraries in North America collection development librarians might be responsible for selecting 90% of what is bought, in a place like Hong Kong they might have to get a faculty member to approve every book.

- **Public services.** Perceptions on both sides of the desk about what is expected of a reference librarian can vary enormously. In some places the reference librarian is only expected to offer directional advice whereas in other parts of the world the patron wants both advice on how to find the information and even the information itself.

- **Personnel management.** The whole idea of staff development can be very different. Some simply accept that the director and a few favourites will take part in professional development opportunities — indeed it is an imposition to have to go to meetings, training courses and that requiring one to do so imply they are not competent. Some staff expect managers to simply tell the employees how to improve themselves. Furthermore, managers who insist that the staff develop the program themselves are simply shirking their jobs.

- **Public relations and fund raising.** Many see these as very North American concepts of doubtful value. For example, some might believe that raising funds oneself might lead the government to shirk its responsibility to pay for everything. Public relations work can also be quite suspect. HKSAR academic libraries, for example, are seen by some as the private property of each institution’s students and faculty and so the whole idea of encouraging the public to learn about and possibly use these resources is prevented at many institutions.

Personal differences. Is changing from one library to the next in the same country different from one library to the next in a new country? No, but some of the issues are the same. All three writers have moved their jobs and therefore relocated their families every few years. Is this restlessness, recklessness, drive or ambition? For example, Tony moved his family from Utah to Texas to the metropolitan New York area. Each of these moves involved securing new housing, finding new schools for children, dealing with new governments, finding new friends and things to do, and spending lots of money to get all of this done. These can be traumatic events in the lives of all rivalling the effects of a fire or a divorce in the family. Pathetically, his middle school age son came home from school noting that while his lunch had been stolen by some very large football players three days in a row his father should not worry since he did not have any friends to sit and eat the lunch with anyway. Moving to a new library will greatly affect one’s personal life and moving to another library in another country can add differences in culture and language as well. But the impacts of most of the differences tend to be personal and not professional.
In sum, it is more than possible that, given the practical and cultural challenges outlined above, with the exception of Medicine, Librarianship may well be the most transferable skill in the world. It is important to think of this whole question in terms of not what one can take from the country one works in, but what one can give in human, personal and professional terms. Only then will one be in the right frame of mind to withstand the undoubted initial pressures and challenges of being so far away from the familiar, the tried and the tested.

Notes
1. Many fairly informal accounts of short stays and work exchange programs can be found in the literature, for example Joling (2002). The incidence of librarians working abroad in any numbers has a fairly short history. Note the brief advice given to presumably the very few Europeans who might wish to be expatriate librarians in the 1970s in Whatley (1977). More formal descriptions can be found for conditions in libraries around the world in, for example, the pages of the UK Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) International Library and Information Group (ILG)'s Focus on International Library and Information Work (ISSN: 0305-8408 – three times a year), and on the websites of the American Library Association (ALA) and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). There are reports on conferences such as Snyder and Griffin (1989). For work exchanges abroad, there are handy hints and addresses in, for example Joling (2002) as well as Owen (2003).
3. This experience has also been reported by another expatriate librarian in Hong Kong (Lyon, 1995).

References

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe the experience of working in Scotland as Vice Principal for Knowledge Management and Librarian to the University.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper addresses some of the reasons for moving and the differences in approach to the job as well as some of the major library and management milestones achieved. It is also a personal view of the issues that were faced in changing countries and cultures.

Findings – The paper gives some findings on what one might expect by making a move of this kind and hopefully will encourage others to do so too.

Originality/value – The world is increasingly international and more accessible. This paper advocates a more international approach to career development.

Keywords Library management, University libraries, Librarians, Scotland

Paper type Case study

Having had the good fortune to be offered and accepted a post at the University of Edinburgh, I was filled with both anticipation and apprehension at the thought of leaving the University of Melbourne and moving to another country to a University I knew little about. However, the prospect of a real change of working environment was enormously exciting after almost 30 years at the University of Melbourne where I began as a cataloguing assistant and worked my way through reference, lending services, and reader services to Associate Librarian, University Librarian, and Vice-Principal for Information. Regardless of whatever mistakes you make in 30 years, you also make some good friends and build a level of trust so that you generally feel well-regarded and this is hard to leave. Taking on a new, albeit similar role in a new country, without close friends, trust not yet earned and the many contacts, the people who know answers, are not yet known to you, is a challenge. On top of that you have a whole new language, culture and physical environment to get lost in. I have some Scottish blood in my veins, my father’s name was Robert (pronounced with a rolling “r”) Charles Gordon Moffat, pretty Scottish don’t you think? However I had never heard the word “driech” or “couthy” before and when I emailed a senior manager to ask him for his “position description” he responded by saying he was lying face down on his computer thinking of sunshine somewhere in the tropics.

I was often asked on my arrival in Scotland whether I had adjusted to the climate. This was no problem at all except in my first week when hurrying out of the rain en route to a meeting I stopped under a tree. Jennie, my PA, asked me what I was doing and I said that I was waiting for the rain to stop. I know better now.

Was I resented for being Australian? No, but not everyone greeted me with equal enthusiasm and there was a real sense in some quarters that no one needed to come in from the outside to tell us how to do our job. That is true. However, I suspect it is easier for an outsider to make changes when they do not bear the burden of too much local baggage. Nevertheless, if it was ever thought that telling people how to do their jobs is an Australian
characteristic I hope I have gone some small way towards changing that perception. Most people know what is needed but see other impediments to making progress.

Why Edinburgh? The University of Edinburgh is a venerable and great institution established in 1582, it stands in the cultural centre of the Old Town surrounded by the Museum, Galleries and the National Library of Scotland. One of the great attractions of The City of Edinburgh is its history and architecture, with the famous Royal Mile separating the Palace of Holyrood at the bottom of the Mile and the Castle at the top. Even after 3 years it is impossible to walk to work through the Old Town without marvelling at the architecture which I suspect is photographed about as often as the Eiffel Tower. The view across the city to Arthur’s Seat, an ancient volcanic hill and a wonderful morning walk gives the city an imposing backdrop. The University itself has old and new buildings which fits well with its values of respect for the past while helping to shape the future through innovation and knowledge transfer. The University of Edinburgh is at the forefront of micro-electronics and computer-based disciplines as well as medicine. Some of the University’s recent inventions are the smallest television and the speckled computer and the University hosts many leading research centres including the Digital Curation Centre which is part of the Information Services Group.

The University is firmly research-based being ranked in the top 10 in the UK in a range of major sets of metrics. It is ranked in the top 20 in Europe and in the top 50 worldwide. In the last (2001) Research Assessment Exercise 75 per cent of staff were in the five or five star ranking. The University employs over 6,500 staff and has over 23,000 students, of which 4,000 are postgraduates with 20 per cent of all students coming from overseas and representing 132 countries. This is important as Edinburgh University has been international in focus for three of its four centuries. Entry standards are amongst the highest in the UK and the number of applications for undergraduate places is the third highest in the UK with 42,366 applications for undergraduate places in 2006. There are many famous students of the University including Charles Darwin, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who graduated with a degree in Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery (after he had acted for a year as ship’s doctor on an Arctic Whaler). Other worthies include Peter Roget, David Hume, James Boswell, Sir Walter Scott and Ian Rankin the writer, who received an honorary doctorate only four days into my appointment to the University. I was processing with him into the University’s magnificent McEwan Hall when he remarked that he wasn’t sure what he had to do at the ceremony. I replied that I knew as much as he did but at least I knew something about Edinburgh having read his Inspector Rebus novels. He suggested, in the circumstances, this might be a pity.

The library preceded the establishment of the University when in 1580 Clement Litill bequeathed 276 books donated to the “Toun and Kirk of Edinburgh”. In 1584 these volumes were passed to the Tounis College and the University of Edinburgh was born.

The library was founded on donation and it became custom in the early history of the University for students to donate a book to the library. Each year the Principal was allowed to select some books of his own choice. “1684 was a very good year for the library, for the contributions from the graduands amounted to more than £200, of which the Principal Adamson spent £97 on twenty one books of his own choice"[1]. When donation registers were kept they listed names such as William Drummond, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Walter Scott, Queen Anne and Rudyard Kipling to name a few. These donations are reflected in the fine books that make up the special collections of the library today.
Early in its history the University developed a culture of managing the library collections diligently and in the 17th century the Town Council threatened to stop the salaries of professors who did not return books, while wire meshes were added to book shelves which could only be opened by librarians. This culture of care and interest continues today but without such barriers to access.

In August 2003 I was appointed to be Vice-Principal for Knowledge Management and Librarian to the University – to head a great library which leads the e-information agenda within the University and nationally, particularly in areas of repository development; the Edinburgh University Computing Services well known for the leading work it plays in network development and regional support; and the Media and Learning Technology Services that had gained an external reputation for innovative work, although in 2003 it lacked critical mass to take advantage of these opportunities. The Digital Curation Centre, added more recently, provides practice and research in digital preservation and curation and we also have EDINA national online data services providing library tools and infrastructure to the UK. Together, these make up the extent of Information Services which overall has a staff of around 520.

My role spans two overlapping areas. One is as Head of the Information Services support group and the other focuses on strategic issues across the whole span of knowledge management for the University.

My job description describes the challenges of this dual role “to develop a visionary and groundbreaking approach to the management of knowledge resources in the University, and to deliver that approach whilst continuing to provide an excellent and cost-effective service. It therefore demands strategic, change management, leadership and general management skills of an outstanding order”.

In my role as Vice Principal for Knowledge Management I am responsible for delivering a single framework and vision for all aspects of the University’s information and knowledge management which includes libraries, academic and administrative IT and e-learning across the university. A knowledge management strategic plan articulates the vision and direction which is supported by various supporting plans aimed towards achieving easy and effective access to relevant information for all members of the university, business associates and partners.

In my role as Head of Information Services, I realised that many of the issues we needed to address were similar to those I was experiencing in Australia and exist the world over. Some of these issues are not only geographical but it seems at least at Edinburgh also historical. For in 1838 when the library had grown to 63,000 items the student body complained of insufficient books, imperfect catalogues and “volumes so ill-arranged as to puzzle the librarians themselves”[2]. Accommodation was described as “most repulsive and uncomfortable” and library hours were considered insufficient, being only from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekdays and 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays. Today’s students have added a new dimension to changes required stating that “Student work patterns are changing. At the same time as having an instant message conversation you could be searching online, reading an e-journal, checking your email and writing your essay! Understanding the way students want to work, and providing them with the ability to work the way they want is synonymous with ensuring that students are efficient and effective learners who are able to manage knowledge when and how they want it. Different types of students require different methods to learn; support needs to be based on the principle of ‘plug and play’” (Nicholson (n.d.).
Student use of academic libraries has changed. They now carry laptops with wireless connections to the University network or access the library catalogue using a PDA. They want a library that is never closed and that creates the right environment for learning to take place. They want all their learning resources online, full electronic texts, federated searching, least manual intervention, more computers, plus books and coffee.

A major building redevelopment programme for the University library begun in 2006 will change the existing award winning Basil Spence building through new thinking and vision, enabling spaces to be redesigned to meet the developing needs of student and staff. This £45M redevelopment will create a library with multi-faceted work spaces, pervasive computing, interactive learning hubs, social spaces, including a new café looking out on parkland gardens, integrated IT, library and e-learning help and support with extended hours of service and easier access to library resources reorganised in a more coherent way. Long-standing issues around reclassifying collections and merging material into a single sequence are also being addressed alongside the project.

The redesign of library spaces has been facilitated by a new collection policy that actively moves us from print to electronic access thereby allowing backruns of printed material to be stored off site. This move has been essential as the library was already at capacity on my arrival in 2003 and growing by around 800 m of shelf space per annum. In size of collections, the library is ranked fifth in the UK behind Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester and the London School of Economics.

Another issue that has been addressed within Information Services is to strategically realign our activities and structures to more effectively support the University’s goals, and to reallocate resources to more clearly focus on key priorities.

The information environment in which information services operates in the UK and elsewhere has changed significantly as libraries have embraced the digital revolution, learning has been enhanced through technological changes and IT is integral to all aspects of university business. As described above, students are more digitally savvy; expecting instant, easy and seamless access to information resources and services. The work of library, IT and e-learning professionals increasingly overlap and intersect. However at Edinburgh previous organisational structures have tended to become siloed and inhibit the level of interaction necessary for optimum coordination and support for research, education and knowledge management.

Information Services has therefore made a step-change by re-aligning like activities and creating new opportunities to refocus more explicitly on the needs of our client community. The aims of this realignment are to strengthen those services that are core, high priority requirements; provide seamless access to information services; address service gaps; and discontinue or refocus in other areas where needed. To achieve these aims we have integrated first line help and support functions, and refocused on our core activities, partnering with Schools and Colleges to enhance education and research programmes at a more strategic level and improve opportunities for working across administrative structures. The realignment was designed to be high impact aimed to improve services but with minimal disruption to existing priority services. As part of the realignment of functions we are also developing a longer term view of our changing roles and the business and technical drivers that are influencing these changes which will help us to improve aspects of our planning, particularly in areas such as human resource planning.

These issues are similar to those already being addressed in libraries and information services elsewhere. In addition, the familiar issue of resource constraint
requires us constantly to review our efficiency and effectiveness using process review and the University’s Balanced Scorecard approach, and to develop strong evidentially-based arguments for planning and budget needs. In relation to collection development, we know that we cannot buy everything we want; we cannot own everything we need; we cannot keep everything we own locally; and we cannot effectively use everything we receive, so many of our issues are around how we resolve these problems all of which will be familiar to libraries elsewhere.

There are differences at Edinburgh too, not just relating to how we are addressing particular issues, but in culture and values that reflect the traditions of more than 450 years as a University that values intellectual intercourse and debate and as part of the Scottish Enlightenment which is described in the following way: “what attracted outsiders[to Edinburgh] as diverse as Adam Smith, Benjamin Franklin and the young Robert Burns was its close knit community of scholars and thinkers, who were willing to take up new ideas while putting old ones to the test of discussion and criticism. Edinburgh was, as contemporaries said, ‘a hotbed of genius’” (Herman, 2002). These same values inform today’s culture and need to be taken into consideration in the context of major planned changes. Reasons for change need to be well discussed and understood without undue emphasis on management jargon, while acknowledging and celebrating existing strengths. While certain traditions in ancient and venerable universities such as Edinburgh can be inhibiting, this is not necessarily true across the board and it is important to understand how to work with the prevailing culture to achieve engagement.

As mentioned earlier, my role in knowledge management spans the University and in this regard, having learned from past experience, I adopted a different approach in Edinburgh than I had taken in Australia. Instead of developing an information and knowledge plan based solely on the work of the information services, I have taken the perspective that knowledge management is broadly based and stakeholders exist both in support groups and Schools. The University of Edinburgh (n.d.) Knowledge Management Strategic Plan has been developed as a functionally-based approach around three core university-wide objectives. The first objective relates to the provision of high quality, sharable, relevant and authoritative information for teaching, learning, research and management. The second relates to efficient and effective information and IT infrastructures, systems and services; and the third to developing a culture that supports collaboration and sharing knowledge as a routine way of working. The Knowledge Management Strategic Plan has multiple authors but one key author for each functional section recognising the role that others have in certain areas. For example the section that relates to e-learning involves e-learning experts from both support groups and the Colleges. Each section of the plan concludes with a list of the key milestones to be achieved over the next three to five years.

All milestones are ranked annually according to importance by each of the Colleges and support groups and the top ranked twenty milestones are reported to the University’s budget and planning committee for particular attention in the University’s funding cycle. This process helps senior managers to know which issues are of most significance to the University across all academic and administrative groupings and it also helps to engage members of the University in the plan itself. In 2004, for example, all budget groupings ranked the need for a new student management system as their first priority; improved navigation of the University’s website and maintaining the library materials budget were also ranked in the top five milestones. As a consequence each of
these were funded in the planning round. In 2005 the key issues were harmonisation of IT systems and better integration of services, as well as preparatory work for the 2007 Research Assessment Exercise. The library materials budget continues year on year to be a high priority. Making progress on these milestones enables us to address both immediate and longer term concerns over the life of the plan. Knowledge management is a cross-cutting goal in the University’s strategic plan 2005-2008 and the three Colleges of the University, along with the three support groups, now include knowledge management strategic targets in their own operational plans. This is helping us to achieve our mission of enhancing the University’s business through knowledge management. I consider that the success of this plan, in comparison to some earlier plans in which I was involved, has been the ability to do a similar body of work with hindsight, having learned from the earlier experience to ensure that it is a plan reflecting academic stated needs, not just those of support services.

People ask me “Why Edinburgh?” and while my answer was initially “an adventure and a beautiful city” I can now say that if you would live outside Australia it has to be in Edinburgh and if you must work anywhere it must be the University of Edinburgh. However, I do not want to give the impression that the move was without its challenges. For example, people from the UK are far more reticent about forming friendships or inviting you into their homes than Australians, and I am very grateful to those who have become friends and close colleagues which has considerably added to my enjoyment of Scotland. In line with all new positions, an enormous initial investment of time is needed and social isolation can make this a difficult and lonely period. There were times when I did wonder about my judgement in making such a radical move, but the support that I received from a few key people considerably helped smooth the way. I also immediately liked and admired my colleagues in the senior executive group which made this aspect of my work both enjoyable and productive. In addition, I have a team of enthusiastic professional managers and excellent staff in Information Services generally. Establishing professional contacts and involvement has helped to ease the way and provide for better understanding of regional and national issues. I have been fortunate to become involved in the UK-wide Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) as a member of the JISC Information Environment Committee and to chair the Repositories and Preservation Committee of this Committee. I became a member of the British Library Advisory Council and I chaired the Consortium of University Research Libraries (CURL)/British Library Cooperative Storage Taskforce – a role that was made possible because of my previous involvement with the CARM store in Australia.

Moving to a new country is exciting and each new place visited is an adventure; not unlike seeing everything for the first time. I made a decision to explore Scotland whenever I could. The first time that I drove out into the countryside I was amazed to see sheep and cows lying down and I was convinced that there was something wrong with them, only to learn that they were not hungry or it was going to rain. Such a contrast to Australia! I was also amazed by the size of the cows and sheep as well as seagulls and bees, and I mistook a wood pigeon in my garden for a duck. My garden has coal tits, blue tits, robins, blackbirds, and woodpigeons as well as visiting squirrels and a fox. I think I discovered my spiritual home in the highlands and islands and Perthshire’s lochs and hills and was struck by the soft light and subtle colours of the landscape particularly in the early mornings and at dusk. Perhaps I found some of my own heritage in Scotland.
Loch Tay (my favourite place)

Birdsong hails morning’s misty glow
Footfall, hushed, along the water flow
Birds awake sunrays pale sheen
Dark shadows turn to brown and green

Evening light grows opalescent silver
Reflections still, deep mauve on water
From heathered hills, and misty grey
Long shadows form across Loch Tay

Helen Hayes (June 2006)

Notes

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Further reading
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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide library managers with information about what to expect if they are considering a post in another country. It challenges a suggestion that a senior manager’s major value is their local network. Rather, the skills, experience, culture and attitude, as well as networks, can contribute to a successful career in another country.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper provides an example of an Australian expatriate senior library manager who took up a post in the United Kingdom. It draws upon literature on cultural differences and knowledge transfer across international borders.

Findings – The paper provides an example of a successful transfer of management knowledge to a new country, highlighting actions taken to form a new management team. Also provides practical advice on personal and social matters that have to be addressed for the relocation to be successful.

Practical implications – Leadership, good management, and an awareness of, and sensitivity to, cultural differences are required for a successful transfer of management knowledge. At a senior level, it is not so much about expertise in librarianship, but management and leadership that are important.

Originality/value – The paper provides a positive example of an expatriate senior library manager moving to a new country. It will be of interest to anyone contemplating an international professional relocation.

Keywords Knowledge transfer, Leadership, Culture, Library management, Expatriates

Paper type Case study

Introduction

How transplantable are senior librarians? In a previous life I knew everybody that counted in the profession and in the periphery thereof, the government, the industry etc. That was the value I added in my job: my network. Move me to another country, and all that is gone. Not to mention moving to a non-English speaking country. A move to a new country means that my market value plummets. I don’t have the technical skills any more and I have a lousy network.

I have been asked to address the above anonymous quotation/question from the perspective of a senior library manager who, in a moment of quiet contemplation, decided that I would like to gain experience working overseas. It was a short period of contemplation, and perhaps just as well as considering the risks, challenges and potential consequences for too long may have been a deterrent. However, my experiences through life have identified that risk taking can bring huge rewards and, on a personal level, I am always looking for a challenge.

The experience I draw upon relates to my move, in August 2004, from one university in Australia to another in England, with a very similar remit of responsibilities. I had an open mind about the challenges of changing job, house and country in one go and didn’t ever consider the possibility that the transition would not be successful.
A short answer to the original question

The value of one’s network cannot be overstated. However, three things come immediately to mind.

Firstly, it was largely through my networks that I was able to secure a job overseas in the first place. When I made my mind up that I wanted a change, my UK network sent me information on positions, salary comparisons and answered my questions about living in England. They then acted as agents by referring my name to head hunters. My network in Australia was not local, regional or national, but international, so a senior librarian can probably contact a number of colleagues in most countries of the world if professionally active, in my case in online and distance learning associations and through the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). Also, many of my vendor contacts work internationally, so I either have the same contact, or someone who knows someone that I know when I am dealing with vendors. It seems a very small global village on occasions. Library trade exhibitions prove it!

Secondly, senior managers understand the importance of networks and deliberately go out to establish new contacts. In my case, as mentioned, my UK network turned out to be very helpful. However, one of the first things I did when I started my new position at Nottingham Trent University, was to identify who were the decision-makers and leaders in my new organisation, and I set about establishing relationships with these key people. So, I was creating a network in my new organisation.

Finally, it is true that I didn’t have the networks into the UK government or some other local organisations that I had in Australia. However, I do know who to ask, or how to find out who to ask, if I need to make a new contact. So, it is not only who you know, but how to find out who to know. After all, we are librarians, and finding information is one of the things we do best.

Language is clearly a barrier, especially if you do not speak the local dialect. In my case, I speak Australian English, a version of the “Queen’s English” that makes me mostly understood in the United Kingdom. However, in the UK there are many, many dialects of English spoken. While my language difficulties are small in comparison to those who have no command of the national language, there are interesting challenges in translating some requirements, or simply fitting in. Do I keep saying “G’day” or do I learn the usual Nottingham greeting “Yo al’right?” When speaking about staff who are timetabled to the enquiry desk, do I ask about “rosters” or the “rota”. These examples are trivial, but I had not contemplated the extent of local variations that I would find in England. Sometimes, it is not the words, per se, that are the barrier to understanding, but the pronunciation and accents. Other interesting language-related differences are perhaps sense of humour, irony and understatement. I am sure that I am categorised as direct and forthcoming when compared to those with whom I work. Is this related to my Australian origins or because of my personality?

Does your value plummet when you move to a new country? My employer in the UK didn’t think so, or they wouldn’t have recruited me from Australia. Do I think I provide value? Time will tell, but I feel that I have made significant contributions to my new organisation and team thus far.

Senior librarian or leader/manager?

I believe a key question in this debate on expatriate senior staff is not about the professional or technical skills, but the managerial and leadership skills a person
brings to a new post in a new county. In my case, I had professional qualifications in
librarianship, tertiary qualifications in business and public administration, and
extensive experience in management, eLearning and serving distance education
students. Given that the areas of responsibility in my UK position (eLearning and
librarianship) are the same as my prior position in Australia, there is a great deal of
commonality. In nearly two years in my new post I have not seen a new professional
problem. We are all dealing with similar professional and managerial issues: how to
bring about cultural change amongst academic staff to use eLearning technologies and
publish their research to digital repositories; how to maximise access to the myriad of
digital resources that libraries subscribe to; how to embed information literacy training
into the curriculum; how to use building refurbishment projects to create “learning
commons” to make access to help easier for students; what policies and safeguards do
we need to put in place if we establish national or regional collaborative storage
facilities for little used texts; how to maximise revenue and minimise costs; how to
create an empowered workforce. The list could go on.

While the professional challenges are the same or very similar, the legislative and
regulatory frameworks are different depending on the country where you work. For
example, the laws of copyright vary, especially in relation to what can be done with
digital copying. In Australia, the concept of a digital reserve/short loan collection was
possible because of the Australian Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000.
In the United Kingdom, it was not until 2005, with the advent of the Higher Education
Trial Photocopying and Scanning Licence[1] that it was possible to digitise 3rd party
copyright works and then only for delivery to those students enrolled in the particular
subject for which that digital reading applies. There are variations in equal
opportunity, disability discrimination, freedom of information and data protection
provisions, for instance, that a senior manager needs to come to grips with quickly, to
be competent. However, the very fact that a senior manager is aware of the existence of
such legislation is a good start, as you can seek expert advice from colleagues about
interpretations and understandings.

Before I move away from librarian versus leader/manager, I want to point out that
many private enterprises employ chief executives who do not have a background in the
industry/profession that they lead. For example, Sam Walsh, Chief Executive of
mining giant Rio Tinto had over 20 years experience in the automotive industry before
moving to mining (Thomsen-Moore, 2005). Terry Davis, the Australian Managing
Director of Coca-Cola Amatil has a background in the wine business (Jones, 2004). It is
their leadership and management skills that are important, not their professional
expertise.

Robert Ellis, principal of the UK consultancy LeadAct, highlights the fact that all
positions have a combination of leadership, tool set (specific skills) and knowledge. At
the senior level, leadership (which Ellis defines as Vision and Direction, Motivate,
Confidence, Making it happen, and Perseverance) is by far the most important attribute
of senior managers. The need for the tool set (project management, programme
management, presentation skills, communication skills, negotiation skills, team
building) and Knowledge (product detail, industry specific, organisation, history) are
required to a much lesser degree the more senior a position is. These tool sets and
knowledge are provided by others within the organisation, and so it is in librarianship.
I know that I have lost my reference and cataloguing expertise years ago and, although
I could update my skills and knowledge quickly, it is my leadership and management skills that I feel are my “selling points”. I write “manager” as my job description when asked to complete official forms, rather than “librarian” (see Figure 1).

My contention is that the real challenges to an expatriate senior manager lie in working within the cultural differences and national stereotypes, understanding the organisational environment and, importantly, understanding yourself and how your behaviours and attitudes can influence those around you. As a senior member of the university staff, my role as a leader and manager are influenced by all these factors.

Cultural differences
Whether the senior manager is the expatriate working in a new country or simply working with a diverse workforce, managing cultural differences is a key skill. Konopaske and Ivancevich (2004) write “As globalisation continues, there will be an increased need for managers and leaders who can be effective, sensitive, and flexible in working with employees from diverse backgrounds, having an array of needs, expressing various workplace values, and possessing many different skill levels.”. According to Hoecklin (1995) “mismanaging cultural differences can render otherwise successful managers and organisations ineffective and frustrated when working across cultures”. Therefore, it is important to be aware of cultural differences, however slight.

How culturally different am I to my colleagues at Nottingham Trent University? Javidan et al. (2005) have grouped countries by cultural clusters with “Anglo Europe” (Ireland and Great Britain) and “Anglo other countries” (Australia, Canada (English speaking part), USA and New Zealand) as separate clusters. Hofstede (1983) groups Australia and Great Britain together with Canada, New Zealand, USA and Ireland. Hofested’s research indicates that Australia and Great Britain have almost identical

Figure 1.
Leadership profiles

© LeadAct
cultural values. Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) add further evidence of cultural similarities stating that Great Britain identifies with its former English-speaking white colonies: Australia, Canada and the United States. Below the surface, though, it is possible to differentiate some significant differences between cultures, for example: the USA would be considered more capitalist than the other countries. Tayeb (2005) indicates that there are even different cultural characteristics between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that comprise the United Kingdom, as well as common values and institutions that create a national culture. It could be presumed that there are no significant cultural differences for an Australian manager working in the United Kingdom although there will be some regional differences to be aware of.

The challenge I faced in moving from Australia to the United Kingdom, in some ways, is really no different to the challenges any senior manager is likely to face in a large organisation with a diverse, multi-national workforce. The expatriate manager is more likely to be one of the minority groups in the workforce, as in my case at Nottingham Trent University where I now work. However, my appointment can be linked to a deliberate strategy in the Nottingham Trent University Strategic Plan 2004-2006 to internationalise its workforce[2]. The University is not unusual in seeking to internationalise its workforce (and curriculum) as universities and organisations acknowledge “transferring knowledge across global boundaries has become an important competitive advantage for organisations seeking success in the global economy of the 21st century” (Fink and Holden, 2005). My new employer made it clear from the outset that I was expected to contribute my Australian experience and knowledge of international developments to my new organisational unit.

Although the above comments would indicate few obstacles to a successful transition from Australia to the UK, it is not that straightforward. Fink and Holden (2005) provide a clue to the issues faced by any expatriate senior manager who is expected to bring past experience and practices to a new appointment: “to impose exclusively the good practices of headquarters is tantamount to renouncing local or regional knowledge”. If I substitute “headquarters” with “Australia” or my previous university employer, you can see the dilemma. I need to use my past experience and knowledge to work with my new team to increase the value of Libraries and Learning Resources (LLR), the division for which I am responsible, without staff feeling like I was trying to create an Australian outpost in Nottingham.

Organisational environment
In October 2003, Nottingham Trent University appointed a new Vice-Chancellor and embarked on re-writing its strategic plan and undertook a significant restructure of its academic departments, moving from nine Faculties to four Colleges and ten Schools. It was, therefore, incumbent on LLR to realign its structure to support these new academic arrangements and this was one of the first issues I faced when I commenced work there in August 2004.

My strategy was to involve key staff in defining the directions and structures that were required to enable LLR to help fulfil the aims and objectives of the University’s strategic plan. To that end we held a number of events that could inform decision-making:
In October 2004, there was an initial planning session with LLR Heads where we agreed on the need for an overall restructure to create three new business units. We reached a rapid consensus and the two most senior LLR staff were designated as heads (now Deputy University Librarians) for Customer Services and Information Resources. A new manager was recruited as head of the Business Support Unit. Prior to this, there were eight staff reporting directly to the Director.

In December 2004, a Planning Forum with key LLR managers was conducted to identify barriers to success and agree some top-level objectives for an LLR Operational Plan. Each business unit then wrote their own action plans to meet the objectives (and overcome barriers) in the Operational Plan.

In January 2005, an LLR Customer Facing Teams Workshop was held to identify changes that were required, especially in a structural sense, to align liaison librarian functions with the new academic structure of the University.

During February and March 2005, LLR facilitated Customer Value Research workshops, which were undertaken with academic staff and students, to identify value propositions, from a service perspective, customers’ ratings of our performance against those value elements, and also the key irritations of our current services. This information was then used to inform the drafting of the following year’s Operational Plan, addressing directly the needs of our customers.

Also in March 2005, facilitated workshops on Virtual Learning Environment functionality were conducted with academic staff and students to inform the eLearning agenda that I had been given in November 2004 (in addition to responsibilities for the libraries at NTU).

LLR staff were engaged with analysis of the data from these consultations. A huge change agenda was identified. The changes we have embarked upon were not because of my appointment, but rather the response of the management team and staff to the University’s new and challenging Strategic Plan 2004-2010 and information from our key customers (academic staff and students).

The creation of new business units within LLR was strategic from an operational sense, but it was also helpful by providing a significant opportunity for a “new beginning” for everyone, not just for me. Prior to my appointment, LLR comprised many separate units, geographically dispersed over three disparate campuses and two locations on the city campus, which had operated somewhat independently. The term “silo” was frequently mentioned at the planning sessions, as was the need to eliminate them. The planning workshops did not focus just on structural issues. We drafted two very important statements that were, in part, to help facilitate a sense of one LLR, rather than a set of separate work groups.

Enhancing lifelong learning, teaching and research through information resources and services became LLR’s Purpose Statement, and was developed through a series of workshops with LLR staff during 2004-2005, building on work completed at the Planning Forum conducted in January 2005. We also defined a common set of LLR Values, again drafted at the Planning workshop and subsequently refined through workshops with staff groups. Through these simple devices, we had the glue to bring
all groups together within a new structure. These actions helped to bridge the cultural diversity that existed within LLR, which had nothing to do with diverse ethnicities, but rather the culture of the organisation at the time. Basically, we were establishing a new organisational culture through a common Purpose Statement and set of staff Values and this, it has been recognised, makes knowledge transfer easier than it would otherwise be. (Javidan et al., 2005)

To implement the change agenda, as described in our Operational Plan, we needed teamwork across the work units and campuses, as most actions had dependencies on one another. Small task groups were established to take responsibility for some of the specific actions in the Plan. Training on teamwork skills was provided to help skill development, and this teamwork training also included staff from an entirely separate division, the IT department, as almost every new LLR initiative had an IT dimension. With this simple initiative, we were effectively building teamwork across divisions, not only within LLR.

Other initiatives were established: A Director’s Team meeting was held every Monday morning to make sure all Heads were aware of issues and activities of the other Units; all Heads produce a monthly report, with progress against operational plan initiatives, cascading upwards their managers’ reports; a monthly Managers Forum was established, bringing together for the first time all managers across LLR to participate in debate and information sharing and networking; an internal monthly newsletter, LLR Link, was established to promote both work-related and social news to all staff. All these activities helped to bring LLR together. I did not feel like an expatriate leader, but a facilitator of a new organisation made up of bits of the old organisation and some new.

You could be excused for thinking that everything went like clockwork. It never does and there have been challenges with implementing this massive agenda. However, two events helped a great deal towards making us more effective as a work unit. LLR expanded with the creation of a fourth unit, the Educational Development Unit, which was established in October 2005 to implement the eLearning agenda of the University. Because a new Head was joining the Director’s Team, we took the opportunity to undertake some targeted teambuilding for this group, to help us understand our personal styles and to celebrate diversity rather than focus on the differences. This has proved to be remarkably successful, resulting in a greater sense of togetherness, teamwork and acceptance of differences. The second event was the 2006 Planning Forum where the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Research), a long serving NTU employee, explained to the team why the University had to change, and change so rapidly. For me, it put the organisational culture that I had inherited within LLR and NTU into perspective, and gave added legitimacy to the change agenda we had embarked upon together. I could not have said the things that were said, as I did not have the local history. It was clear that change was necessary because of the market place and the state of NTU, not because there was a new director of LLR. The Planning Forum also gave the opportunity to say that the past WAS valued, although we had to be different to be successful in the global world of higher education. At that Planning Forum, participants described LLR as it was then (January 2006) and described what they wanted LLR to be like in three years time. The next Operational Plan will include actions to help create that new LLR.
Personality or nationality?
I have included “national stereotypes” deliberately as I am aware of perceptions that all Australians are “can do” type people, that we like change, and just “get on with it”. While this is not necessarily true for every individual Australian, it is a description that I would identify with.

As part of LLR’s senior management Team teambuilding activities, we all undertook the Margerison and McCann Team Management Profile (2005) (Margerison and McCann, 2005), an inventory tool for assessing how you prefer to work and interact at work. Margerison and McCann say “It is a common mistake to blame problems within cross-cultural teams on different national characteristics. However, misunderstandings are more often due to differences in the way people approach work, regardless of nationality.”. In the terms of the Margerison and McCann Team Management Profile, I am a “Thruster-Organiser”. From my personal profile, Thruster-Organisers “are leaders of the way, not followers...who make things happen by organising people and resources so ideas, discussions, and experiments are turned into action...and will set objectives and take action. The Thruster-Organiser’s motto is ‘let’s do it now and get it finished’. I think these are accurate descriptions of me. So do I perform the way I do because of my “thruster-organiser” preferences, or because I am a “can-do” Australian, the national stereotype? At Nottingham Trent, others often explain my style in terms of my nationality, but that is clearly not the only explanation. I may be an expatriate director but I am also an individual with my own personality, experiences, and emotions.

I am aware that there are differences between myself and my experiences and others with whom I interact. Some of these can perhaps be explained because of my Australian background. For example, we speak the same language but have different terminology and accent. Australians, by and large, have less regard for the status of people than is perhaps the case within English society whose origins are based on hierarchies and classes. I am more inclined to want opinions and recommendations from those who can make contributions, rather than rely on the fact that I can impose my views because I am the boss. I do like to get things done, rather than talk about things. I suspect that these traits could be equally attributed to my personality and management style rather than because I am Australian.

Being aware of my personal styles, whether it is the Myers-Briggs personality preferences, or Margerison and McCann Team Management Profile, or the Boyatzis, Goleman and Hay Group (2004) Emotional Competence Inventory, helps me adapt to the situations in which I find myself. This skill is especially helpful when dealing with cultural differences, but it is a skill required of any manager regardless of where they work because, as mentioned elsewhere, the workforce is becoming more diverse.

Expatriate dilemmas
In many circumstances, a decision to become an expatriate involves more than just the individual relocating. Therefore, I shall provide some background and personal experiences in which to frame my relocation.

For expatriate families, where two careers require consideration, the decision to move countries can be problematic. Hardill and MacDonald (1998) provide case studies, from the perspective of the women involved, and identified significant problems of relocations to another country. Few instances were recorded of where the woman was
the lead in the relocation and they cited the inability of the female partner to get a job at all, or at an appropriate level given the person’s professional qualifications. They also cited problems when the couple returned to the home country, highlighting difficulties in re-starting the career again due to breaks in service and the need to update skills from when they left. They also mentioned personal and financial problems that developed because of the career problems.

My personal circumstances were such that moving to another country was a possibility: my husband wanted to retire and undertake voluntary work (which can be done anywhere) and our sons were adult age (although two were still at university when we made our decision) and looked forward to the potential of trips to foreign lands to visit parents. Thus I did not have to contemplate the issues of accommodating dual careers.

There are other considerations that must be addressed if the relocation to a senior post is going to be successful. The challenges of settling into a new position, let alone one in a new country, are sufficient without having to deal with a myriad of personal and family problems. Good planning was required to sort day-to-day issues, which required consideration in two countries: managing financial affairs and appropriate tax arrangements, consideration of pensions and superannuation, wills in each country if you own real estate in both, establishing new social networks while maintaining the old networks in the home country, gaining access to appropriate medical and dental services, and the list could go on. My employer in the UK was very supportive with the relocation assistance it provided, and this ensured a smooth start in my new country.

The biggest problems in moving country, in my experience, were leaving aged parents and pets. Where possible, negotiate to have regular “home travel” as part of your package so that you can regularly touch base. “Mateship” is a common characteristics attributed to Australians. Leaving Australia and the close friends and special working relationships that develop was a wrench. However, with the wonders of modern technology it is very easy to keep in contact with family and friends. In an emergency, we are only a day away! I am also trying to develop that sense of mateship amongst my new friends and colleagues, for example by organising an Australia Day party after work on 26 January, something that I would not have done if I were still residing in Australia.

Conclusions
Fink and Holden (2005) highlight that: transfer of management know-how from any cultural base is seldom straightforward; transfer of management knowledge takes time; and transfer of management know-how is heavily dependant on how the values, attitudes, competences, and personality traits enmesh with each other. They go on to say that finding the appropriate people can be difficult but vital to manage cross cultural issues. Sparrow et al. (2004) highlight the low numbers of female expatriates but provide evidence that “women may well be suited to the needs of international management because of their interpersonal skills.” I would like to think so.

My experiences lend evidence to Fink and Holden’s conclusions. Moving to any new job is complex; add to that cultural differences and the challenges increase. However, on reflection, many of the issues are the same with starting any new senior position. Personal credibility is a plus, and I discovered that my new team had done their research on my background, so that when I commenced work I had already a degree of
professional standing on which to build. I was also fortunate that Australia enjoys a 
high reputation in my two areas of expertise, librarianship and eLearning, with two UK 
professional associations hosting recent study tours to Australian universities, both 
visiting my previous place of employment, Deakin University. The Society of College, 
National and University Libraries (SCONUL) visited Australia in 2005, and the 
Association of Learning Technologists published a report of its 2002 visit, “Keeping up 
with our neighbours: ICT developments in Australian higher education” (Boezerooy, 
2003). Since arriving in the UK in mid 2004, I have been invited to speak to a number of 
conferences and workshops, sometimes being explicitly asked to compare and contrast 
my Australian and UK experiences. This has to be handled very diplomatically!

Coming back to the original question about whether we retain or lose market value 
by moving countries, I believe that I am making a valuable contribution at Nottingham 
Trent University, though this is for others to judge. Feedback is largely positive, 
although it is not possible to please everyone all the time, and with such a change 
agenda, it is impossible not to cause some ripples. Before I made the decision to move 
countries, I had taken advice from a human resource recruitment expert, and the 
feedback I gained was in direct contrast to Hardill and MacDonald’s findings in 
relation to problems of moving back to my home country. Rather than finding it 
difficult to find employment on my return (assuming I do return), I was advised that I 
was potentially “even more employable” because of the experience of working overseas 
and by demonstrating my flexibility and capacity to take risks, both of which would be 
seen as advantages to a prospective employer.

Australia is a nation of travellers because of geography. We have to travel if we are 
to go anywhere, either in our own country or overseas. Sparrow et al. (2004) discuss the 
concept of people’s willingness to move internationally and provide evidence that 
young Australian managers and professionals, in particular, are receptive to 
international mobility. While I can’t claim to be “young”, I was the same age when I 
relocated to the UK as my Australian parents when my father took an international 
post in Brazil. So, perhaps it was in my genes that I would become an expatriate 
manager.

Notes
1. Available at: www.cla.co.uk/support/he/HE_TrialPhotocopyingandScanningLicence.pdf 
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Transplanting a Director of Libraries: the pitfalls and the pleasures

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to show that library managers are increasingly moving from one country to another as globalization makes its mark. What constitutes good leadership and good management and are the skills and knowledge transferable?

Design/methodology/approach – There are cultural differences which must be understood. The cultural differences relate not solely to country or region but also to institutional variations and environments. Outlines the pitfalls and pleasures.

Findings – Library managers moving from one country and culture and one organization to another require considerable energy, knowledge and skill in making the change.

Originality/value – The pitfalls and the pleasures are outlined – and neither should be underestimated.

Keywords Libraries, Library management, Leadership, Culture

Leadership skills and styles

Many seminars are held which bring together executives from all walks of life to learn from speakers who have been successful CEOs. These seminars are all predicated on the transferability of skills from one area to another and from one person to another. The World Business Forum[1] recently held included leaders Bill Clinton, Jack Welch, Rudy Giuliani and Colin Powell in their speaker list. For the guidance of aspiring leaders, the speakers presented their views on a wide range of topics – keeping the innovative spirit alive, and the bottom-line going up; successful strategies for navigating transformation and change; delivering sustainable results; moving from crisis and conflict to understanding and partnering; the decision making process; gaining self-confidence (stated as a key success factor for a true leader); and meeting expectations and obtaining results.

Considerable work has also been done within the competency framework on the requirements of senior leaders in organizations[2]. These competencies include the ability to deal with ambiguity and change; a strong customer focus; good decision making ability based on a mixture of analysis, wisdom, experience and judgement; the effective management of innovation and good ideas; the ability to motivate and empower others; strong negotiation skills involving winning concessions without damaging relationships; organizational and strategic agility; understanding clearly how organizations work; anticipation of future consequences and trends; capacity to build effective teams; and the ability to communicate a compelling and inspired vision. It is assumed that these competencies are required in all types of organizations – worldwide.
The literature on leadership in various types of organizations calls for very similar qualities. Leaders must challenge the process; formulate the vision, both long-term and short-term; communicate the shared vision; enlist others above, below and sideways; lead the development of implementation strategies and action plans; develop, enable and recognize others; detect and exploit opportunities; provide a safe, supportive, attractive and welcoming environment with leading edge facilities; secure appropriate funds and resources; identify and correct deficiencies; manage by walking about (without falling into the trap of micro-management); be sensitive to others; understand the politics; adopt the TRUTH model (Trust, Respect, Understanding, Tact and Honesty); inspire and motivate others; and demonstrate humility, courage, passion, humour, compassion, reflective practice, emotional intelligence and wisdom.

Leadership skills and qualities identified for leaders and senior managers in both the corporate and not-for-profit sectors are similar. But are they similar world-wide? What differences if any are there in leading and managing organizations in Chile and China?

Cultural differences
There are hundreds of different definitions of culture. Different societies and social groupings have different cultures[3]. Culture may be considered “the way of life for an entire society” encompassing language, religion, norms of behaviour, values, systems of belief, morals, dress, manners, customs, art, literature, lifestyle, traditions and other material, intellectual, emotional or spiritual features.

Cultures are frequently differentiated by region or country and broad generalizations made about the differences. Canadians for example are thought to be more individualistic than Malaysians who are considered more group-based. Different cultural norms are often ascribed by gender, educational level, or region in terms of East versus the West. While many generalizations are made, they are frequently not supported by basic survey or sound research techniques although anecdotal evidence demonstrates some of the contentions made.

There is considerable general advice to all about being open and respectful of other cultures and there are guidelines about behaviour and gestures which might be considered inappropriate with particular cultures and in particular countries. The adage “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” did not develop without basis. A recent study conducted under the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness) research program postulates some worldwide leadership differences and cultural implications for working in specific countries (Javidan et al., 2006). This study found that while there are universal aspects of leadership, people in different countries do judge their leaders differently. The study identified nine culture dimensions: performance orientation assertiveness, future orientation, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance which were matched against cultural clusters, e.g. Anglo, Latin America, Southern Asia and Confucian Asia.

The study also examined six cultural profiles of desired leadership qualities: charismatic/value-based, team-oriented, participative, humane-oriented, autonomous and self-protective and matched them against the culture clusters. Anglo cultures regard charismatic/value-based dimensions highly but the Middle East does not. Different countries do have divergent views on many aspects of leadership
effectiveness but they also have convergent views. Universally, honesty, foresight, planning, dynamism, being encouraging and motivating and communicative are thought to be effective. Being a loner, irritable, egocentric and ruthless are considered ineffective worldwide.

However, colonialism, migration, improved communication and increasingly internet use have “coloured” all regional cultures. The globalization of commerce is changing the basis of local cultures. One can eat in McDonalds and drink a Coke almost anywhere in the world. One can buy Louis Vuitton, Gap and Burberry, real or fake, in Kuala Lumpur and London. One can watch CNN, the BBC, and CSI in various languages on various continents. While variant local versions are made of films, television programs and cartoons, and some words and expressions are translated differently in different regions, many traditional cultural differences do seem to be smoothing out.

Migration movements across the world have led to the disappearance of monoculturalism in most areas. Many countries and regions have rich and diversified cultures with the mix of many different groups who all contribute some of their own traditions and values. Management of multiculturalism in the workplace is seen as a significant issue. Notions of leadership in multicultural countries in the global village are much more complex. Grouping all “Anglo” cultures together masks the considerable differences that exist between the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. While there are cultural differences in relation to leadership styles and characteristics in particular countries or regions, these are becoming more blurred, more complex to understand and therefore more difficult for individual leaders to manage.

Organisation cultures
While regional and national cultures are important considerations in determining appropriate leadership styles, so too is the specific culture of an organization. The term “corporate culture” or “organisation culture” is frequently used to refer to the internal characteristics of a particular organization. It generally encompasses a set of beliefs and values – ways of doing things within a particular organization – “that is just the way we do things here”. One finds expressions like a “culture of complaint”, a “complacent culture,” and a “performance culture”. In seeking to understand the culture of an organization, one looks at many factors. Tradition and history play a significant role. Organizations with a long history tend to have a culture which is risk-averse and slow to change. Organizations more recently established are usually innovative and flexible in their approaches. Organizations where employees stay for many years are sometimes slow to take on new ideas. In examining organization culture, the “stories” are important. Newcomers to organizations need to learn and understand the “stories”, the habits, the myths and the legends.

The formal organisation structure in place may describe one approach to the decision making in any organization, but there are frequently invisible networks and power structures which are more significant than the formal ones. These may be associated with unions, particular cultural groups, component parts of the organization or charismatic factors of particular individuals. These all present challenges for the newcomer and constitute part of the organization culture. It is sometimes difficult for newcomers to understand that decisions taken many years ago and environmental constraints long since gone continue to be powerful determinants of current and future
plans, activities and ways of thinking. An examination of past reward systems is usually extremely revealing. Those behaviours which in the past were rewarded continue for many years. Staff who perceive themselves to have been badly treated in the past bear grudges for many years and frequently take out those grudges on new appointees. Old practices can die very hard indeed.

In a consideration of corporate or organization cultures, it is useful to reflect on the fact that sometimes when not-for-profit organizations seek to take on ways of leading and managing within a commercial environment, they are said to be adopting a “corporate culture”. It is not always clear exactly what this means but there is usually a negative connotation. There is an expectation that such a corporate approach is associated with cost cutting, staff reductions and changes in worker benefits. In implementing change, such views easily get in the way.

Organisation cultures are often also associated with particular industries or employment groups. Educational organizations have different cultures from car manufacturing companies. Various descriptive terms and values apply to particular professional groups. Each profession is associated with particular expertise and experience – new entrants to the profession become acculturated to it. Accountants are associated with careful attention to detail and high levels of honesty (although recent corporate fraud on a massive basis might put the lie to this). Journalists are associated with detailed investigative work. Nurses are caring. Secretaries are hard-working. Salespersons are not always ethical. And librarians? Risk-averse? Slow to change? Good organizers? Committed? Focused on clients?

In considering the impact of culture on library management, the culture of country or region is a factor to be considered. However, the organization culture associated with a particular organization and/or specific profession must also be taken into account (Cooper, 2004).

The changing library context

The literature of librarianship all over the world testifies to the significant changes occurring in libraries. The library retains its role as a repository of knowledge and a means of organizing knowledge and providing access to it. The handling of printed material remains as a core mandate but with the accelerating electronic digitization of all components of human intellectual creativity, the library constitutes a portal into the world of knowledge in digital and print formats. The Library must manage the scholarly information output, as books continue to be published, scholarly journals are created, and information in all genres becomes available on the internet. Selecting relevant resources from the vast plethora available and providing guidance in access and use are becoming ever more challenging and urgent tasks for libraries to ensure that what is acquired is what is needed and wanted and that services provided are those most in demand. The already widespread use of electronic devices particularly among younger generations presents the library with many new challenges and is forcing major modifications to library practices. Serving the net generation requires new support services, specially designed information products and services, engaging library experiences, new kinds of librarians and differently designed libraries and learning spaces. An extensive range of web-based information resources enables users and library staff to work from home or office at their own pace – any place, any space, any pace.
All libraries are part of a larger institutional environment, whether it be corporate, government (provincial, state, federal, local or municipal), educational, or other type of organization. Libraries are dealing with the changes occurring in their parent institutions. Some of the trends emerging are an emphasis on accountability, a focus on service and outcomes, financial constraints, and the need for long-term planning, renewal, efficiency, effectiveness and innovation. While library staff in the front line play a key role in providing focused services to ensure all utilize the wealth of information sources available, all library staff are required to make speedy and appropriate responses through well-designed websites, effective catalogue structures, easy-to-use database search interfaces, targeted collections, innovative services using blogs and RSS feeds, institutional repositories, appropriate training and instructional programs in information use, internet links using search engines like Google, partnerships with other information service providers, online help and effective communication strategies. Library staff are no longer custodians of knowledge but companions to learning and information resource discovery and use.

Appropriate library leadership
What kinds of library leaders are necessary in these new environments? The British Library in seeking new Executive Directors recently identified the following qualities as some of those required[4]:

- highly motivated leaders, enthusiastic and tenacious, calm under pressure and with a sense of humour;
- the strategic vision to contribute to the success and future positioning of the British Library, its brand and services in relation to global best practice and challenges, and changing needs of its major audiences;
- the ability to navigate and direct change in a progressive and strategic way, creating commitment to such change;
- an ability to communicate complex ideas clearly and persuasively at all levels internally and externally, including the media; and
- a commitment to the development, coaching, encouragement and reward of best performance from staff at all levels.

Barbara Dewey in writing in North America on leadership and university libraries addressed the leadership characteristics required (Dewey, 2005). She referred to Type A characteristics, Agile, Analytical, Assertive, Adaptable, Appreciative and with the Ability to Ask. She went on to describe the need for leaders with the capacity for developing innovative strategies, the ability to contribute actively to building and shaping library and institutional missions, priorities and plans, excellent communication skills, unbridled enthusiasm and regard for the library and its parent institution, user-centred-approaches to service delivery and skills in fundraising and external relations. The lists of requirements are endless and perhaps it is not surprising that leading libraries are experiencing difficulty finding effective library leaders.
Cultural differences and libraries
Libraries across the world are different. While some of the differences are associated with national or regional cultures, others are related to varying professional practices which have built up over many years in a specific region, largely through the educational system in place for librarians. For example, while there might be issues in implementing sound borrowing systems in libraries in Western Samoa where ownership of materials is very much culturally associated with community ownership and the notions of public good, access to library materials in Vietnam seem more associated with ideas brought from education in the former Soviet Union, which emphasised closed access and the use of the BBK classification scheme. The whole issue of predominantly “closed access” collections or predominantly “open access” collections appears to be based on regional professional practices. Libraries in countries where there has been less external contact have benefited less from changes in professional practice over the years. The almost worldwide acceptance of international classification schemes like Library of Congress and the Dewey Decimal Classification, which have been translated into many languages and the international observance of cataloguing standards based on MARC have led to general library practices which are observed internationally and are less guided by local cultural differences. The purchase of internationally based integrated library managed systems and involvement of organisations like OCLC and IFLA (International Federation of Library Organizations) have hastened the spread of common library practices and procedures.

Transplanting library leaders
Can library managers and library management skills be transferred? While there are cultural differences related to country and region as well as organization, the impact of multiculturalism and the development of common library cultures worldwide have led to many successful transitions. Over many years, senior library leaders have moved from country to country, from region to region, from one type of library to another, and from the same type of library to another type of library.

There is a general understanding that leadership styles vary with situations. A fairly direct almost autocratic style is appropriate in a dangerous situation or where significant change is required quickly. Participative approaches are not favoured where a strong focus on the bottom line is required. An organization not meeting client needs requires a detailed analysis of needs and service provisions involving the views of many. Any attempt within an organization to undertake change without a good understanding of the organization culture in place would be bound for failure. An understanding of the culture involves understanding of regional and country characteristics, the professional norms in place, the organizational values and the characteristics of individuals employed.

A personal perspective on the cultural differences
My own career has involved working in different types of libraries, primarily in Australia and more recently in Canada, and also included a stint teaching in library school as well as numerous consultancies. The libraries in which I have worked include a government science library, a state library and several university libraries, and the career trajectory commenced with a position as a student assistant and ranged from
zero responsibility to two positions as University Librarian. I have undertaken consultancies in Western Samoa, Oman, Brunei, Indonesia, Vietnam and other parts of South East Asia. I have undertaken visits to libraries in China, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States.

There are certainly cultural differences associated with language, country and region. Work ethic approaches vary tremendously from country to country. Hours of work and commitment vary. As already noted, the education and “acculturation” of librarians vary considerably from country to country and region to region. There are varying client needs in particular regions and institutions — institutions still relying on “chalk and talk” approaches to teaching will require different library services from those institutions where problem based learning has become the norm. One learns to observe the differences, understand them and adapt to them. Nonetheless, there are many similarities. Each library requires collections based on user needs and requirements. Each library uses an integrated library management system and in general the selection, implementation approach and use are similar, and involve training of staff and adaptation of current practices and procedures. Each library develops services to meet client needs and provides instructional and training programs for users.

The Australian/Canadian experience
Most Australians live on the coast of Australia, in a few large cities, although their national cultural characteristics are frequently associated with the inland. Most Canadians live within 100 km of the USA border — they define their culture frequently as non-American. Australia and Canada are both members of the British Commonwealth and have similar ethnic origins, although the French influence in Canada has been a major driving force. Both countries have significant indigenous and aboriginal communities which have shaped their current cultures. Both countries have similar parliamentary structures. Australia’s convict origins have shaped its approaches and values of equity are held dearly as they are in Canada. There are significant cultural differences which are difficult to identify and describe briefly.

The work environments have elements of commonality. In Australia, there are 38 universities, which are diverse and autonomous. All educate undergraduates and postgraduates and undertake research and scholarship. Student numbers vary considerably from around 5000 at some smaller institutions to 40,000 at the largest. The older, larger universities are comprehensive in their disciplinary coverage and research-intensive. Funding is primarily from the Federal government who under the Australian constitution take a central role in setting guidelines for operation of universities and oversight quality of service delivery, although the universities are established by state legislation with some funding coming from the state level[5]. In Canada, there are 92 universities. There is no federal ministry for education or centralised government accreditation. Universities are the responsibility of provincial governments, although some research funds come from the federal level of government[6]. Canadian universities, like their Australian counterparts, vary in size and disciplinary focus, with many quite small institutions. Canada’s first university, Université Laval, was founded in Quebec City in 1663. Australia’s first university, the University of Sydney was founded in 1850.
Universities in both Australia and Canada are moving to think of themselves as multi-functional and while seeing their major roles in teaching, education, learning, training and research, they view their roles as vital to the community, both in social and economic terms. In both countries, universities are experiencing challenges in government reductions of their funding bases. While collaboration among universities is still high, there is also a strong element of competition and individual student experiences in each university in both countries are seen as crucial not only to the quality of learning but also the ability to continue to attract high quality students. Increasingly, it is being realised that universities are where young people live, eat, sleep occasionally, grow up, socialise, gain lifetime friendships, participate in sport and gain skills as well as knowledge. They are not just places of learning and research. The practices of Canadian libraries are similar to those in Australia and similar to those in the United States.

A significant difference between Australian university libraries and Canadian university libraries is that Australian librarians may be members of the same union as faculty, but are not customarily regarded as faculty. Most Canadian university librarians are regarded as faculty. While the cultural differences resulting from this are difficult to describe precisely, there appears to be is less of a centralist approach to the development of policies and plans as a consequence and library staff have different preoccupations. While evidence-based librarianship is developing as a concept and more research is being devoted to library concerns, it is not unusual for librarians to conduct research outside of their areas of professional expertise. In general, however, the differences in culture observed in Canadian university libraries are the results of differing organization cultures rather than differences resulting from country or regional norms and values.

McGill University is located in Montreal in the province of Quebec, where Francophones dominate. Montreal is a multicultural environment as is McGill, although the University is primarily Anglophone. It is very important for McGill to operate in its Quebec environment and staff are expected to be bilingual. McGill is a traditional publicly funded research-intensive comprehensive university. It has like most institutions its own ways of doing things and its own culture. Many staff have worked only at McGill and have worked there for many years. Some of its ways seem unusual to newcomers and the phrase “Welcome to McGill” is frequently heard. The University is highly regarded and was recently nominated as the top Canadian university in the Times Higher Education Supplement list of outstanding universities in the world.

The pitfalls and the pleasures
There are varying stages of culture shock in arriving at a new institution (Schein, 1999). The first is the honeymoon period. There are new friends and colleagues to meet and exciting new experiences. This period is followed by “Sauerkraut” as the newcomer settles in. Difficulties in the workplace are identified; judgements are made on both sides; first impressions may have been inaccurate; problems seem more intractable. Leaders in this situation find like-minded individuals, some of whom are also new, and gain strength from them. Some leaders experience severe culture shock and a few become so isolated and despondent that they leave. Others go through a lengthy adjustment period and job performance may initially deteriorate before
improving. Others adjust more quickly and cope well with the new environment. The existing value systems are the most difficult to cope with. People who have worked in one environment for a very long time are risk-averse and view change as threatening. There are others however who have wanted change for a long time and have not been able to achieve it. They are excited by the newcomer and relish in new tasks and new approaches. Human resources issues are always the most difficult to deal with. In introducing change, the benefits must be extolled in terms of individual gains as well as institutional improvements. It is also important to pay tribute to past achievements. Change must be placed as part of a continuum. Several issues which have been surprising for me are the differences in client focus and the lack of emphasis on occupational health and safety. Industrial relations issues inevitably are related to local legislative requirements as well as custom and practice and understanding these can be difficult.

A challenge has been finding the most appropriate advice. It is important to seek out advice from a wide range of sources, to listen to it carefully, to weight it up – and then to go with one’s one judgement. Conflicting views are frequently provided and determining the best way forward has not always been easy. One inevitably makes mistakes. Je suis desolée is the only response. The appropriate pace of work and change is difficult to determine. Being on a limited term contract sharpens the mind and the pace. Is it better to remove the adhesive bandage slowly or quickly? Is it short-term pain for long-term gain? Determining priorities can be difficult – there seems to be so much to be done.

The secret of success is the same as it is anywhere in introducing change. First listen to everyone and understand the environment. Next undertake the planning, involving as many as possible, although initially it may not be possible to involve everyone. Develop the priorities and action plans. Seek out and involve the supporters of new directions. Assign responsibility for implementation. Monitor achievements and evaluate the outcomes. Provide staff development and training opportunities for everyone. Recognise the difficulties and do not be diverted by them. Understand that it is two steps forward and one step back (and sometimes the reverse!) all of the time. Recognise and reward achievement. Relax and exercise to maintain energy and resilience. There are many pleasures in taking on new challenges. It is very rewarding and most enjoyable to get to know new people, make new friends, understand new ways of doing things, gain fresh perspectives and insights and make a contribution to the success of another organization.

Notes
4. Private correspondence from the British Library.
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Consulting across cultures: librarians and project management in Vietnam

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to offer a number of reflections based on the personal experience of working as a librarian in Vietnam.

Design/methodology/approach – The approach is subjective and is based on the author’s observations and conclusions as a project consultant to several philanthropic projects in Vietnam.

Findings – The paper briefly describes these library projects and then discusses some of the more significant professional and personal challenges and rewards they involved.

Practical implications – The paper provides some practical guidance on approaches to project management across cultures and on issues specific to library project management and consulting in Vietnam.

Originality/value – The paper is both a contribution to the small body of literature on the impact of philanthropic assistance and projects on libraries in Vietnam, as well as a personal narrative on the experience of working as a professional librarian in another culture.

Keywords University libraries, Vietnam, Project management, Philanthropy, National cultures

Paper type Viewpoint

Prologue – Melbourne

The first time I reflected on my career as a librarian working overseas occurred in 2002, when I was sitting in an office of the Australian Government Department of Immigration at Tullamarine Airport in Melbourne, my home town. I was being interviewed because I had given my occupation as “librarian”, but the stamps in my passport indicated that I had passed in and out of Vietnam and other Asian countries at least twelve times in the previous two years. The two did not ordinarily equate, and naturally the officials there were keen to know why.

With mounting apprehension, I attempted to explain that I was employed as a consultant to a number of library building construction and development projects in Vietnam. The more I described my work, the less plausible it also sounded to me, that an Australian librarian could be taken out of a typical management position in an academic library, and apply his professional skills and experience in library projects overseas, immersed in a completely different country, society, culture and professional practice. I anticipated an examination far more searching than anything I had encountered while studying for my librarianship qualification, but fortunately this proved not to be necessary. The Immigration Department accepted my explanation, and perhaps all I had to do from then on was convince myself that not only was it possible for a librarian to work overseas, but that the professional skills we possess are both highly useful and applicable to overseas philanthropic project work of this kind.
Learning resource centre projects in Vietnam

My entry into the world of “international” librarianship came about through the involvement of my employer at that time – RMIT University, Melbourne – in a series of philanthropic projects in Vietnam. In 2000, the University was in the process of establishing its campus in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, after many years involvement in the country, and a lengthy period of preliminary development and negotiations with the Vietnamese Government. (Wilmoth, 2004) In the course of this a relationship had been established with an international philanthropic organization – The Atlantic Philanthropies (2006a, 2006b) – which had common interests in education in Vietnam. Atlantic at that time was actively involved in a number of programs in education and public health, and had already established an “Information Resource Centre” at the University of Danang in central Vietnam, utilizing the services of another philanthropic organization – the East Meets West Foundation – in association with the University of Queensland.

Atlantic sought the assistance of RMIT to implement its own program of educational infrastructure development in Vietnam, which involved the construction of a number of large scale library buildings, or as they were eventually to be termed, “Learning Resource Centres”, in collaboration with provincial Vietnamese universities. This began with the development of a Learning Resource Centre on behalf of Hue University in central Vietnam in late 2000 (Hue University, 2006), but eventually grew into a suite of projects for the construction and development of Learning Resource Centres with the universities of Da Nang (commencing in 2002), Can Tho (in the southern Mekong Delta region, commencing in 2003) and Thai Nguyen (in the country’s northern mountainous area, commencing in 2004). (The Atlantic Philanthropies, 2006a)

The initial project in Hue was to be managed by the RMIT University Major Projects Unit, which was also handling at that time the establishment of the University’s campus in Ho Chi Minh City. The Unit developed the funding proposal for a Learning Resource Centre – its design, construction and fit-out – but perhaps reflecting Atlantic’s experience in developing educational facilities elsewhere in Vietnam and the world, the proposal also included an explicit and detailed program of library development activities, addressing such areas as IT infrastructure, library management systems, print and electronic resources acquisitions, recruitment and training of management and staff, and operational and service development. Once built and operating, the library was to be transferred to Hue University to operate as their own concern.

In order to undertake the project in Hue, RMIT needed the expertise of a senior librarian, not only for design development but for the development, co-ordination and implementation of these programs in IT and library systems, acquisitions, and training and service development. At that time I was an Associate Librarian with responsibilities which included business development and facilities management, and I had worked on redeveloping library buildings and facilities at a number of RMIT campuses both in Melbourne and in Hamilton in western Victoria. I had been employed as a librarian in various positions for over fifteen years and had often wondered about the prospects of working overseas, but had not done much to pursue this. Two weeks after being invited to join the Vietnamese projects, however, I was on a Vietnam Airlines flight to Ho Chi Minh City, along with the then University Librarian, several other senior RMIT staff, and my first project meeting for the Hue LRC.
Over the course of the next five years I gradually became more involved in the Learning Resource Centre projects, moving from my initial role – which was to draft the design brief for the Hue University LRC – to a full-time secondment as a library consultant to the RMIT Major Projects Unit, and finally in August 2002 to be re-located to Ho Chi Minh City as the Director of the LRC Projects at the newly established RMIT International University Vietnam. (RMIT Vietnam, 2006)

Professional challenges

Moving from a mainstream career in Australian academic library management to one as a consultant to Vietnamese university libraries presented a significant number of changes and challenges. Joining the Hue LRC project just as it began to take on some momentum, I had little time to prepare myself both personally and professionally for working in Vietnam. Like any tourist, I consumed what I could from guide books, but from a professional perspective, there was little information to go on except through the briefings of the RMIT Major Projects Unit and the hand-holding of its more experienced and well-traveled staff.

With few precedents anywhere for this type of library project, much of my experience in managing different aspects of the projects was subsequently accumulated first hand through my work over a period of time, and involved not just a major shift in professional role from manager to consultant, but an adjustment to a new country, to Vietnamese life, customs, language and traditions, and to different political and organizational cultures. The following are a few of the professional challenges that emerged.

Infrastructure issues

One of the most immediate challenges was that my working environment was not an existing library as such, but a project which began with a building site and quite literally developed from the ground up into a functioning academic library service. The brief for each of the Learning Resource Centre projects was to design, construct and fit-out a library building of between six and nine thousand square metres, and to develop the whole range of library facilities, resources and services which would be typically encountered in a “western” academic library. What the brief didn’t mention was that in almost every respect, this would need to be done without the benefit of an existing infrastructure of library facilities, resources, bibliographic management, trained personnel and a corpus of professional practice in Vietnam upon which these projects could be based.

While there have been some dramatic improvements in Vietnamese academic libraries in the recent past, the Learning Resource Centre projects were undertaken at each university largely without the presence of an infrastructure of library services which would be typical in an Australian tertiary institution. As a typical example, the library services encountered in Hue at the beginning of the project were in a bad state, with buildings and collections both in poor condition, some of them severely water damaged by flooding in the city in 1999. Most of the libraries were chronically short of funds, without much professional or management expertise to deliver services, and little relationship to a curriculum which was itself in need of reform. Bibliographic management was rudimentary and lacking in standardization, and materials were sometimes simply accessioned and organized by size. This was possible because...
collections were usually held on closed access, and housed in several separate rooms. With limited resources for acquisitions, many of the libraries at Hue continued to rely heavily on foreign donations of materials, with the result that most had holdings in a number of foreign languages, largely unused and irrelevant to student needs. Services were generally custodial in nature, without active reference and support services for students. Although library management systems exist in Vietnam, at this stage there was considerable development work still to undertake, and a number of libraries continued to use the CDS-ISIS system provided by UNESCO. There was virtually no access to electronic resources, and internet connectivity was painfully slow and highly unreliable.

The response to a number of these problems was often to innovate and to develop infrastructure which provided a framework from which not only the Learning Resource Centres but other Vietnamese academic, public and special libraries could benefit. As an example, having identified some fundamental weaknesses, considerable development work went into the Vietnamese library management systems in place in each of the LRCs, to bring them to the desired level of functionality. (Denison and Robinson, 2004) In addition, workshops were conducted with librarians from throughout Vietnam to identify appropriate standards for bibliographic control, which subsequently lead to projects for the authorized translations into Vietnamese of bibliographic utilities such as MARC21, DDC and AACR2. Low cost access to electronic resources was sourced through several vendors, and the introduction into Vietnam of programs such as PERI (Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information), (INASP, 2006) leading to the development of a consortium of Vietnamese libraries, was initiated through symposia funded through these projects. Issues of professional practice and standards were also explored in a symposium on the possible development of a Vietnamese library association. With the assistance of Atlantic Philanthropies, these and several other projects have emerged from the LRC projects, not only addressing capacity issues at a local level but providing sustainable infrastructure for all sectors of Vietnamese librarianship. These programs have also included professional training and sustainability management projects for the LRC’s, involving a number of library schools and professional librarians from around the world. (Atlantic Philanthropies, 2006b)

Organizational issues
Beyond the immediate practical problems, working on the Learning Resource Centre projects also required sensitivity to Vietnamese social, political and professional cultures. The typical systems and arrangements of tertiary institutions in Vietnam, for example, include a number of characteristics of which a project has to be aware in order to achieve successful outcomes.

As the Learning Resource Centres were relatively high profile projects, involving major issues of finance, prestige and reputation for the client universities, it is not surprising that there was a considerable level of active involvement in the project at all levels of each university. In most cases, this was a significant advantage for the project, as it facilitated processes such as obtaining government approvals for different aspects of the project. In some cases, this involvement could have negative consequences, and there could from time to time be extreme sensitivity around issues such as employment of staff, or choices of contractor or supplier. On the other hand, in other cases some University administrations were demonstrably reluctant to participate in the major
decisions of the project, to avoid any suggestion of corruption on the part of University officials, and to keep such a possibility at arm’s length.

The outcomes that have been achieved in each of the projects, reflect to some extent the style of the university’s engagement with the project, and its aspirations, leadership styles and levels of co-operation and risk taking. This was evident for example in the designs of the LRC buildings themselves, which in some cases were relatively traditional structures intended to “fit in” with existing building stock, and in other cases quite innovative buildings for the current state of public architecture in Vietnam, to serve as flagships for the ambitions of the universities concerned.

The vision and commitment of the Vietnamese universities to the Learning Resource Centre projects could also differ from one institution to another. The most successful outcomes in the LRC projects were achieved where there has been a local champion for the project within the recipient university, who has not only engaged most frequently with the project management team, but also acted as an advocate for the project within the parent university, working to secure agreements and approvals within its administrative machinery. While these people provided great leadership to each project, it is a feature of Vietnamese universities to turn-over key administrative positions with a change of University President or Rector. Consequently, in the life of a project in Vietnam, these key personnel could change and their loss represented not only the loss of expertise and accumulated experience of working on a project, but also a loss of continuity and momentum and the need to re-establish the working relationship with a new group of people. It is also not uncommon for such people to be employed in more than one position in the university, often on account of the modest salaries offered in the tertiary sector. As a result, from a project management point of view, this can be occasionally frustrating in the fulfillment of project commitments, as key decision makers are distracted or unavailable owing to other professional commitments, and the centralized nature of Vietnamese bureaucracies does not allow for greatly devolved levels of responsibility as an alternative.

**Professional culture**

The projects also involved significant challenges for the working cultures and habits of the librarians involved at a day to day level in the development and management of the Learning Resource Centres, and therefore a challenge for foreign librarians such as myself to successfully introduce new concepts and practices. As the brief for each project explicitly sought to change professional practices in Vietnamese libraries, moving for example from closed to open access collections to encourage a far greater level of independent access to information for students, this entailed substantial changes in thinking for local librarians, not least because existing practice placed heavy emphasis on the librarian’s role and responsibilities as a custodian of the physical collection, rather than as a facilitator of access to information. In addition, day to day work habits and commitments could intrude and clash with the demands of the project schedule, so that for example changes would occur to work and training schedules frequently with little or no notice. In some parts of Vietnam, the working day commences very early but is punctuated by a long break for lunch in the middle of the day, making it difficult to get through a demanding work schedule in limited time. In other areas, lunch itself could sometimes effectively signal the end of the working day!
Many foreigners who travel or live in Vietnam – if they do not speak Vietnamese – can possibly be forgiven for failing to recognize also the extent of the influence of politics and government on all levels of the day to day business of the country, as they encounter an open, friendly and vibrant society. In a working environment, however, this presence is more visible. Organizing professional meetings, and inviting foreign professionals to address these meetings, for example, can require prior approvals at different levels of government and its security agencies. Cultural and ideological clearances must be obtained for the importation of foreign books and journals. While of course similar issues exist in many other countries, by definition projects involving libraries and librarianship are concerned with improving access to information, and a great deal of sensitivity was required to address these issues while also achieving positive outcomes.

Communication
Language, culture and history inevitably have had an impact on the communication and working dynamics between a largely foreign project team and the Vietnamese client institution. While in many cases key staff in the Vietnamese universities could speak English, it was commonplace for most meetings and correspondence to be in both languages, and for discussions to be through interpreters. This inevitably created some separation between Vietnamese client and foreign project team, which was bridged to some extent by the employment of both local and overseas Vietnamese in the project team.

However, a complex range of issues are involved in the relationships between a foreign funding body and its project management on the one hand, and the local client on the other, and for any librarian working in this environment there will be significant challenges to overcome. A Vietnamese university which finds itself the recipient of generous and prestigious assistance from a foreign donor may also have difficulty in openly asserting its interests, and patterns of communication evolve at all levels of the project which allow the views of the institution to be heard. Coming from the more straightforward management environment of Australian universities, the manner in which this communication takes place is not always understood or appreciated. The communication gap may be breached, for example, through intermediaries, involving a completely separate layer of discussion on an issue, and unsettling the established decision making processes of the project team.

Vietnam from a professional perspective
Although there were a number of complex challenges and issues to deal with as a professional librarian working in Vietnam, my personal experience of working as a consultant on the Learning Resource Centre projects – and being based in Vietnam – was very largely positive and rewarding. Living and working in the country involves an immersion in the culture and society of that country, and this naturally is a significant advantage for developing effective working relationships and goodwill, and for achieving positive and lasting outcomes in the project.

For the particular requirements of this work, acting as advisor and consultant to the projects but also managing the “library” aspects of the project on a day to day basis, it was more effective for me to operate from a base in Ho Chi Minh City than from Melbourne. It meant that supervision of work at each of the sites was improved, that regular contact with client universities and their lead personnel for the projects could be maintained, and that if issues developed on a project they could be identified and
responded to relatively quickly, especially if they required travel to the site. While a “fly in fly out” operational style had been manageable for the early stages of the projects, this lacked the continuity and depth of understanding that working within the country could offer.

The closeness of the contact, too, allowed me to understand the past experience of Vietnamese librarians, and the substantial challenges they face in resourcing and managing library services. This, I hope, enabled me to provide assistance which was practical and meaningful, and relevant to the Vietnamese context, rather than to impose foreign concepts, systems and practices, without considering their impact locally. Vietnamese library professionals of many years experience will quite sensibly not automatically accept the advice of foreign professionals, as they are more conscious of the restraints under which they work. It is consequently fundamental to the provision of worthwhile assistance from foreign organizations that these limitations are recognized, and that a collaborative process is developed.

For an expatriate, one of the key personal benefits about living and working overseas is that every day includes new and altogether different experiences. I was extremely fortunate to be involved in project work which required me to travel the length of Vietnam, and I frequently had to wonder if I was really allowed to do this for a living. The commute to work at Cantho, for example, involves crossing the Mekong River on a ferry, while a spare hour in Hanoi can allow plenty of time to wander through the fascinating streets of the Old Quarter. The work itself was also intrinsically interesting, almost manically varied and engaged me in the work of other professions so much that this in itself was a learning experience. For much of the time, I was fortunate to work with experienced project managers from Australia who had worked in Vietnam previously, and I benefited greatly from their guidance and experience, and spent a great deal of time at construction sites, being schooled for example in the differences between bored and driven piles (actually, it’s really quite interesting!), formwork, cold pours, floor loadings and all the other details of building construction.

One of the most rewarding professional aspects, though, was to be able to contribute my experience and expertise as a librarian to this mixture of talent and expertise brought together for each project. Managing across different professional cultures can be demanding, especially as it was my role to ensure that the issues of developing and running a library service remained central to the projects, and that we did not lose sight of this when confronted with the competing pressures of architects, builders, and engineers, all of whom had their own time, cost and quality constraints. Conveying what librarians do – and why – was a constant theme of my work in Vietnam, and not always readily understood by the many stakeholders in the projects. In one meeting I recall a construction manager advising me earnestly of the exact time in the project I would be required to install the Dewey Decimal System, as if like everything he dealt with, it arrived on the back of a truck and could be off-loaded and installed. In retrospect I wish it had been that simple! Playing this professional role cheek by jowl with other professions reinforced for me the value of librarianship and the contribution that I could make in this situation, and also gave me a new appreciation of the depth of my experience and how it could be utilized.

One of the difficulties, however, is that librarianship of course involves a number of specializations, and sourcing the relevant expertise to be applied to the projects at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way has been one of the most significant
challenges faced. Working overseas, my network of professional colleagues that could be turned to for advice or assistance was more remote, and the feeling of being professionally isolated was also exacerbated by working outside the mainstream of the profession. While I subsequently developed a similar network amongst Vietnamese librarians, this was not of great use to me in engaging more foreign professionals in project work. In the course of the projects, different methods were used to apply professional library expertise to project tasks, including locating staff on-site, fly-in-fly-out contractors, and short-term secondments from RMIT University Library. For various reasons, each of these approaches can be ideal when applied to certain project requirements, but have not been without difficulties, not least because each new appointment involves a whole new process of acclimatization and adjustment before an effective contribution can be made.

A sense of isolation could apply also to maintaining up to date knowledge of practices and trends in the information professions overseas. This was important not only for my own sake but for the information and skills which I and other professional colleagues were passing on to counterparts in Vietnamese libraries. Possibly because I was more directly engaged in project management rather than library management, I found that I very quickly lost track of the latest activities in Australian libraries, and only with some effort maintained contact with colleagues in Australia. I relied in particular on conference attendance for professional development, although because of project commitments this too was infrequent and was usually only possible if it included project related work. Ironically, while my connection with Australian librarianship diminished during my time in Vietnam, my knowledge of libraries, library schools and other institutions and agencies involved in philanthropic project work improved greatly, as these became my most frequent points of contact with librarianship in the “outside world”.

Vietnam from a personal perspective
At the time I was first offered the opportunity to move to Vietnam, I had already been working on the Learning Resource Centre projects for almost two years, and had the benefit of regular trips in and out of the country. I had become familiar with many aspects of Vietnamese society and daily life, I could speak some basic Vietnamese, and was used to traveling up and down the country regularly. Even so, the prospect of re-locating to Ho Chi Minh City was daunting, as it involved resettling my wife and young family into a country and a lifestyle with which they were mostly familiar only through my stories, photos and the souvenirs that came home with each trip. It also meant in many respects a much more definite departure from a continued career in mainstream professional librarianship in Australia, and of course a disentangling of many of the ties that bind us to a place: – family, work, homes, mortgages, friends, lifestyles.

While this process for us was assisted by a prior knowledge of Vietnam, it was nonetheless challenging for all members of our family. Vietnam, despite its colossal economic growth, is still very much a developing nation with all its attendant health and social issues. With time it becomes second nature to drink bottled water out of necessity rather than preference, or to think about where the salad came from before you dare to eat it. At the beginning, however, there is an extended and sometimes difficult period of acclimatization and of learning how to get things done, where to buy, how much to pay, who to contact, and a range of other new experiences.
My children were initially won over to the idea of living in Vietnam by a holiday which consisted exclusively of five-star hotels and resorts, which of course gave them absolutely no preparation for living in the country! They nonetheless adjusted quite quickly once we moved to Vietnam, and developed new friendships and interests, and settled into a new routine at one of the international schools. Not long after moving to Ho Chi Minh City, my wife was also able to continue employment as a librarian, and we settled into a new home, made new friends and started to become familiar with the western as well as Vietnamese aspects of the city. My employer, RMIT University, also provided allowances which were essential to cover the basics of health, accommodation and children's education, in a city which is rated in the top twenty most expensive cities in the world for expatriates. Being able to achieve some level of stability in all of these areas was essential to our settling in Vietnam and remaining there for three years.

However, we now live in Hong Kong and have remarked on many occasions on how much easier it is to live here. Children whom I thought had adjusted completely to life in Vietnam are now delighted to be living in Hong Kong instead, and point out the availability of movies, books, places to visit, things to do and friends to hang out with, which makes me reflect much more on their stoicism when living in Vietnam. There is a well established and very supportive network of expatriates in Hong Kong, and friends both for adults and children alike do not re-locate so frequently for their work. By contrast with Vietnam, the “normal” life we now live in Hong Kong has highlighted for us how different life had been in Ho Chi Minh City, on the one hand pleasant, but on the other lacking in the social, cultural and other activities one would assume of a developed city.

Epilogue – Hong Kong
Not long after moving to Hong Kong, I was chatting to another expatriate professional and he asked me how I came to be living there. When I told him I was a librarian he was frankly astonished. What on earth is a librarian doing earning a living overseas? Even librarians can be “expats” these days?

I suppose that he had never considered librarianship as a career with international possibilities, and I have to confess that until a few years earlier I had much the same impression. However, while many of the issues associated with working and living overseas are the same for all professions, I believe that librarianship opens up some unique opportunities and possibilities, and can be a highly “portable” career.

I had the opportunity after my initial trip to Vietnam in 2000 to move back into my old management role at RMIT if I preferred. Instead, I chose to become more involved in the Learning Resource Centre projects, and have thrived on the professional and other opportunities they have offered me. Since those initial few damp days in Hue, the Projects Unit at RMIT International University Vietnam – in collaboration with many other organizations and individuals – has proceeded to complete and deliver three of the four Learning Resource Centre projects, with Hue opening in June 2004, Danang in July 2005 and Cantho in April 2006. While these projects have been described in more detail elsewhere, (Robinson and Chien, 2006; Robinson, 2006) these LRC’s provide the most advanced academic library services and facilities currently available in Vietnam, and offer a model for library development elsewhere in the country.

During my employment on the projects, I had been concerned from time to time that the longer I stayed in Vietnam – removed both by geography and occupation from my Australian professional base – the less employable I would become. In fact, the reverse
has occurred. We continue to enjoy living in Asia, and indeed I continue to remain involved in Vietnamese library projects as well as in a whole range of new activities and projects which have come about through my current position as the Director of a Hong Kong academic library. I am not only pleased but grateful that I was given the opportunity to step outside my traditional role, and to make a contribution to librarianship in other parts of the world.

References


About the author

Michael Robinson is the Institute Librarian at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong SAR. Prior to this appointment he was the Director of Learning Resource Centre Projects for RMIT International University Vietnam, based in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Mr Robinson worked as a consultant to the Learning Resource Centre projects, which are the subject of this paper, from 2001, and was overall Director of the projects between 2002 and 2005. He has also been involved in several other philanthropic projects in librarianship in Vietnam, including the project management of the Vietnamese translation of the Dewey Decimal Classification system, and prior to this worked at RMIT University Library, Melbourne, Australia. Michael Robinson can be contacted at: robinson@ied.edu.hk

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to bring together theory, research and practice to inform library management.

Design/methodology/approach – Explores the library context using CD-ROM based services. Analyzes the product life cycle and portfolio matrix concepts.

Findings – Most library and information services function in an entirely different context so there needs to be caution when extrapolating between sectors is not straightforward. Despite these challenges, the ideas and concepts have resonances that can be used by those managing library and information services.

Originality/value – Reflects on how the concepts of product life cycle and portfolio matrix can be applied in library management.

Keywords Libraries, Library management, Product life cycle

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The concepts of the product life cycle and portfolio matrix have been influential in giving strategic guidance in the commercial sectors and have made some impact in the Not for Profit (NFP) organisations. These ideas provide an insight and perspective that can be used to shape future library service development. Paul Simon, the American singer songwriter, wrote a song about the one trick pony: “He’s got one trick to last a lifetime, but that’s all a pony needs”. Unfortunately the ability to survive for a significant period of time relying in a single, unchanging activity is a luxury available to few individuals or organisations. The concepts of the product life cycle and the portfolio matrix supports an organisation when reviewing its services and products. A monitoring process is necessary to establish whether services should be developed or enhanced or discontinued. Activities. Those for which there is a finite, diminishing demand have to be replaced by services with an increasing, future demand.

The purpose of this column is to bring together theory, research and practice to inform library management. The two concepts being considered (product life cycle and portfolio matrix) have been primarily developed in organisations whose primary purpose is to make a profit for the shareholders. Most library and information services function in an entirely different context so there needs to be caution when extrapolating between sectors is not straightforward. Despite these challenges, the ideas and concepts have resonances that can be used by those managing library and information services. The column will commence by exploring the library context using CD-ROM based services as illustration There will then be an analysis of the product life cycle and the portfolio matrix concepts A reflection will then be given on how the theories can be applied in library management.
Developing, maintaining and withdrawing services in libraries

Across the world, libraries offer a wide range of information services to many different user communities. These services have to be designed, developed and adapted as the users' demands and expectations evolve. There will also come a time when the service has to be reduced or withdrawn as users' needs move. A good way to examine how this is manifested is provided by examining what has happened to CD-ROM (Compact Disc Read-Only memory) technology in libraries over the past 20 years. CD-Rom is a type of optical disk capable of storing large amounts of data (up to 1GB which equates to about 300,000 text pages. From the early 1990s, different libraries began to incorporate this new technology in their services. They were used to provide electronic access to databases previously only available online (Reid, 1992), access to journals in electronic format (Imhoff et al., 1994) and also to electronic reference material (Rowley, 1994).

A 1993 survey of the use of CD-ROMs in New South Wales public libraries indicated that 77 per cent of public libraries had integrated them into their services (Scully and Chester, 1993). Public libraries had also developed CD-ROM lending services (Nicholls, 1994) and it was predicted that the demand for these services would increase. From providing access to CD-ROMs via stand-alone computers, efforts were made to networking them across organisations (Davis, 1993). Libraries developed substantial training programmes for potential and current CD-ROM end-users (Mas, 1994; Everett, 1994). By 1994, the issue of CD-ROMs in libraries had become significant enough to merit the production of a textbook on their library management (Hanson and Day, 1994). There were advocates for changing the physical configuration of library space (Bolin, 1994) to accommodate CD-ROM technology.

By the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, commentators were beginning to question the long term viability of CD-ROMs. It was acknowledged that online databases and CD-ROM would converge through the increased acceptance of the Internet (Schneemann, 2001). The widespread use of CD-ROMs to archiving patents was challenged with again the Internet proposed the preferred access medium (Kallas, 2000). Some were still arguing that CD-ROMs would not be eclipsed (LaGuardia, 1999) but others acknowledged that the CD-ROM was being superseded (Haydock and Craft, 1997). Library services had to adapt to the development of the World Wide Web which in many ways removed the need for CD-ROMs. In the developing world, the move away from CD-ROM stored information to Internet sources is slower (as was the actual original move to CD-ROM (Majid, 2001). The prediction that the CD-ROM was a “transient” technology (McSean and Law, 1990) emerged as reality.

The use of how CD-ROMs shows the development of a service from where there is a low level of demand, to a position where it is very heavily used and finally to where a service declines. The obvious key challenge for the library manager is not to have all services at the same stage as development. If this is allowed to happen, then eventually the library will cease to exist.

Theoretical perspectives on the product life cycle and the portfolio matrix

The concepts of the product life cycle and the portfolio matrix have been considered over many years as being relevant. Most companies (and public sector services) offer more than one product/service and many serve more than one customer. This is defined as developing a portfolio of products/services. Lynch (2006) has explored why this makes sense strategically. Relying on a single product or service carries immense
risks if the service/product fails or the customer goes elsewhere. The challenge is to develop a balanced portfolio of products or services. In order to fully comprehend what this balanced portfolio means an understanding is needed of the product life cycle and the BCG portfolio matrix. Both these concepts have also been explored in the library management context by Toit (2002). The idea that a product/service has a life cycle cannot be attributed to a single individual. It underpins many theoretical perspectives on the strategic development of products and services. A recent textbook defines the product life cycle as “a graph showing time plotted against monetary sales of a product as it moves from introduction through growth, maturity to decline” (Wheelan and Hunger, 2006, p. 119). Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the cycle. In the not-for-profit sector (NFP), the demands/level of use can equate to the monetary sales. As a service goes through these stages it will need investment to help it grow, have a level of attractiveness to gain a market share and capital to sustain its growth.

The product life cycle has been developed from the biological life cycle (Marketing Teacher, 2006) with identifiable stages of introduction, growth, maturity, decline and withdrawal:

1. **Introduction.** Need for immediate use or profit is not present. There are high costs in maintenance with limited income.
2. **Growth.** Less expensive to maintain and sales/usage levels increase. Competition begins to increase.
3. **Maturity.** Costs continue to decline and levels of usage increase. Service/product is very profitable.
4. **Decline and withdrawal.** The market shows a downturn with very powerful competitors being seen as being preferable. This stage results in many services being reduced from the market.

It is possible to map the development of CD-ROM services in libraries can be mapped against these various stages. It must always be remembered that the product life cycle is a model and as such has various deficiencies. Very few products/services follow such a prescriptive cycle and also they do not necessarily go through all the stages, for example some go straight from introduction to decline. Despite these concerns, the product life cycle is helpful to consider how library services evolve and develop.

Figure 1. Product life cycle
The challenge for the library manager is to consider the range of library services being offered and how they can be balanced. There needs to be a range of products/services in a library that are in different stages of development. A balance has to be reached between new and old services. The portfolio matrix model (Figure 2) has been produced to inform how a balanced range of services and products can be provided. The matrix was originally suggested by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in the 1970s and as a result one version is known as the BCG or portfolio matrix (Lynch, 2006). The portfolio matrix analyses the range of products possessed by an organisation against two criteria: relative market share and market growth. Within the commercial sector, market share is important because it is advantageous to have a larger share than rivals. The market growth is crucial because markets that are growing offer more opportunities for activity than lower growth markets. Adaptations have been made for the NFP sector and these will be explored later in this column. This allows it to be applicable to library management. Figure 2 demonstrates that the matrix is actually four areas which merge into one. These four areas have been given distinctive names to signify their strategic significance.

1. **Stars.** These are services with high relative market share operating in high growth markets. They will need heavy investment but will generate large amounts of income. As the market growth rate slows down, the need for investment will also diminish and the strategy is about making them cash cows.

2. **Cash cows.** Within the market context, they have high shares but low-growth areas. The business is mature to they will require little investment. It is therefore likely that they will generate both cash and profits.
(3) Problem children. This representation shows services with low market share in high growth markets. The high market growth means they will need investment and the low market share indicates they will not generate substantial cash. It is very difficult to predict whether problem children will move to become stars or dogs.

(4) Dogs. The lower right quadrant contains those services which have low market share in low growth businesses. It is very difficult to escape the low market share position.

In portfolio management, the recommended strategy is to take cash from the “cash cows” to fund “stars”. In terms of a well balanced product portfolio, it is important to have a number of “stars” which can grow. There also needs to be a number of cows to generate revenue. The advantages in using the BCG matrix are that it focuses attention on making a service profitable and it helps develop strategies and the long term growth of the portfolio. The graphic depiction also facilitates communication. The criticisms of the portfolio matrix revolve around it being very broad brush and that good strategies develop from more than market analysis. It also indicates a level of scientific rigour when in reality positions are based on subjective judgements. Having perjorative terms such as “cash cow” and “dog” can lead to self-fulfilling prophesies.

The NFP sector has enhanced the matrix so it becomes more relevant to services/products which are not driven by financial profit levels. In NFP organisation such as libraries, there are a set of activities or projects to which new ones are added and old ones removed. Portfolio analysis for NFPs can help improve the mix of activities. Bryce (1986) suggest that the life cycle of a product can be equated with life cycle of need. These needs can remain stable but very often change. A matrix has been developed (Open University, 1989) where the market growth and market share are replaced by the external attractiveness and the internal appropriateness of activities. The external attractiveness concerns its capacity to attract resources and the internal appropriateness is about the extent to which it “fits” an organisation. Mantanari and Bracker (1986) have developed this to produce the public sector portfolio matrix. The “cash cow” becomes the “golden fleece”, the “dog” becomes the “back drawer issue”, the “problem child” becomes the “political hot box” and the “star” becomes the “public sector star”.

Strategic development of library services informed by the product portfolio matrix

Models have their place in establishing strategic direction as they are effective in identifying relationships and opinion. They cannot represent the real worlds complexities and they do not take into account gaps in available data. Nevertheless, the library manager can use the concepts to ensure there is a balanced portfolio in their library and information services. For many years, the library equivalent of the “cash cow” has been the book lending service. There has been a high level of need for the service and also libraries have been able to effectively supply this service. In terms of the product life cycle, it has been at the stage of maturity for many years. Having a service at this stage has allowed library staff to develop other services as the demand for lending was reliably high. There are some indications that book lending being the “cash cow” for libraries may be no longer be the case (Grindlay and Morris, 2004) as borrowing levels decline.
An obvious “star” on the horizon in the public library sector is the provision of e-content. A recent survey has shown an explosive uptake in e-content in public libraries (Dearnley, 2006). The public need for electronic information has been growing and its benefits include widening access to collections in branch libraries and 24/7 remote access. There is still a need for high investment in electronic information in public libraries but economies of scale are likely to develop. The long term strategy for public libraries (and libraries in other sectors) will to be develop e-content to become the equivalent of a “cash cow”.

“Problem children” are those services which have not achieved a dominant position but have potential to move in this direction. They also need high levels of investment. An example of this provided by a study of a closed local history collection in an Australian public library (Allery, 2000). Various strategies were adopted to move it from being a “problem child” to the position of a “star” in that library. Another example of a service that could be interpreted as a problem child are the applications of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) in libraries. This technology allows libraries to dramatically increase the reach of the library web site and also improves library visibility. Its position as a “problem child” is described by Byrne (2005) who explores whether it is a fad or whether there is a future for the technology.

There are also services which can be equated to the library equivalent of “dogs”. These are services for which there is low need and level of effectiveness. An obvious example is the impact of electronic information and databases on the provision of print reference collections and print indexes and abstracts (Sowards, 2003). The advantages of electronic provision (speed of access, currency, ease of use) has challenged the need for the continuing existence of these large, physical collections. As a result, the large scale provision of printed abstracts and indexes and reference collections has been removed in some libraries (Reid, 2006).

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Solving Management Problems in Information Services

Dr Christine Urquhart

Chandos

Oxford

2006

Keywords Performance measurement, Library management, Information services, Management technique

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Dr Christine Urquhart is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Information Studies, University of Wales Aberystwyth. She states that the aim of her book is to demonstrate that some simple techniques can be used to make the life of the harassed manager easier and more interesting.

Dr Urquhart opens her book by exploring the dilemma faced by most library managers; that is the need to measure performance as a means of justifying their requests for funding and support even though this is often at odds with their professional values. It is important that measures are meaningful and have a real purpose and one way to ensure that this is the case is to compare inputs with relevant outputs.

Apart from the opening and closing chapters, the book consists of practical instructions and examples to demonstrate how statistical data can be used effectively. For example, how the CORREL function in Microsoft Excel can be used to create a chart showing the relationship between visitor and checkout statistics.

Dr Urquhart suggests the use of sampling as a way to measure quality, for instance to check the quality of cataloguing entries a random sample of books could be retrieved from shelves and the records checked for errors. Process indicators can highlight areas of poor process design by identifying bottlenecks and variations.

Many different laws and theories are quoted, along with a range of equations and formulas which could be used. At first glance this may seem very daunting and off-putting to anyone who is not mathematically-minded, but the mathematical techniques are simple and easy to use. In addition, little anecdotes and analogies are used to paint a picture and illustrate the points clearly and simply. One of these is used to illustrate how comparison and collaboration might be measured. In it Dr Urquhart compares Google to “the others” to measure the difference between how the customer’s wants or needs are met by Google, as opposed to how we might think their need should be met.

The chapter on costing provides useful tips for developing a methodical way to identify costs and predict future costs. This includes non-monetary costs as well as costs to users, and how to measure time-saving as a cost-saving element. Dr Urquhart also demonstrates some risk management techniques for times of uncertainty using a matrix of probability.

The last part of the book looks at forecasting and simulation as well as trends and variations. Examples in these chapters describe the impact of situations such as queues
and batch arrivals (e.g., a large playgroup) or the rationing of items (e.g., loan limits per subject) on the measurement of people or loans. Some of the solutions include averaging arrival rates and simulating workflows. Formulas and equations are suggested to facilitate these measurements.

Solving Management Problems in Information Services is a book that you would reach for when you have a specific performance measurement need, and would like a simple but effective method of meeting that need, with results that can be clearly shown. With so many equations, formulas and theories throughout this book, unless you are very mathematically-minded it is not one that you would generally pick up and read from cover to cover.

However, if you don’t want to waste time recording statistics or keeping performance measurements that do not have any meaningful context or which cannot be clearly demonstrated when and where it counts, then this great little book can definitely help.

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Review of Electronic Journal Management Systems: Experiences From The Field
Edited by Gary Ives
Keywords Electronic journals, Library management
Review DOI 10.1108/01435120710744254

Electronic Journal Management Systems: Experiences from the Field provides a contemporary snapshot of the issues, solutions and innovations available for libraries to employ in managing electronic journal resources.

This work is a series of papers that came together as a result of a call to library related discussion lists for contributions on the topic of Electronic Journal Management Systems. The papers have been co-published simultaneously as “The Serials Librarian”, Vol. 47 No. 4, 2005.

The papers cover the broad range of approaches that libraries worldwide are grappling with in relation to effectively managing the content and delivery of electronic journals. A diverse range of outcomes is possible for libraries employing an Electronic Journal Management System after reading these papers.

Susan P. Marshall and Jodee L. Kawasaki’s paper on “The Master Serial List at Montana State University – A simple, Easy to Use Approach”, on using Microsoft Excel to manage all of their serials subscriptions can confirm for some, that quite often the “simplest solution is the best”.

Robert Alan’s “Electronic Resource Management: Transition from In-House to In-House/Vendor Approach” demonstrates the virtues and pitfalls of developing, managing and integrating in-house Electronic Journal Management Systems.

Karen McMullen and Derek Wilmott’s paper on “Taming the E-Journal Jungle: The University of South Carolina’s Experience with TDNet” outlines their process in implementing a commercial Electronic Journal Management System.

Alternatively, a paper such as “Integrating and Streamlining Electronic Resources Workflows via Innovative’s Electronic Resource Management” by Tull et al.
pursue Electronic Journal Management Systems that are stand alone or wholly integrated into their existing Library Management System.

Each one of these papers can deliver valuable insight into the complexities associated with the effective management of Electronic Journal Management Systems. Any library professional who is responsible for managing serials will benefit from this selection of papers as they demonstrate a wide range of solutions are available to effectively manage electronic journals. Alternatively, it will open the mind to new and innovative approaches to managing electronic journals in libraries today.

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Managing Academic Support Services in Universities: The Convergence Experience
Edited by T. Hanson
Facet Publishing
London
2005
Keywords Library management, Academic libraries, Information services
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“Convergence is used to describe the situation in which the library and academic computing services, with or without other services, are brought together for managerial purposes under a common full time executive director generally recruited from a professional information background” Clive Field, Chapter 2.

For an understanding of the issues underlying the decision to converge services, in particular, Library and Computing, and the reality of implementing such a change, this edited text provides a comprehensive summary. The book is divided into 21 short chapters; including 16 case studies on the experiences of specific post secondary institutes in the United Kingdom, with a further 5 chapters offering an overview of convergence in the UK, Australia, Europe and the USA.

The majority of the case studies present scenarios where convergence was deemed successful, with only a few where services converged and then separated, or a decision was made for Library and Computing to remain distinct services but to identify areas for greater cooperation.

For readers interested in change management, the specific case studies also provide useful information on good practice, as well as the pitfalls to avoid when implementing a change that involves a merger of two distinct organisational cultures.

In many of the examples cited, the decision to converge was made at a senior executive level and so the change management issues centre, in most cases, on the difficulties of implementing a decision that has been imposed on rather than initiated by the staff.

While the content is interesting, this is not light reading material. Because each author is offering a synopsis of their experience, there is a great deal of information packed into the 216 pages of this edited book. The structure of the chapters and the provision of an extensive index, however, do enable the reader to “dip in” and select the areas of most interest.
This book would appeal to managers of current Computing and Library services who are interested in investigating the possibility of convergence or any staff involved in the process. It may not have general appeal to staff working in Libraries but is recommended professional reading as it describes a different approach to administrative structure for educational support services.

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Success at the Enquiry Desk: Successful Enquiry Answering – Every Time (5th ed.)
Tim Owen
Facet Publishing
London
2006
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Most people have access to search engines today. The challenge for the information professional therefore is to demonstrate expertise when it comes to finding the information their enquirers need. In *Success at the Enquiry Desk* Tim Buckley Owen, who has had extensive experience in the library and information services field, shows us how to rise to this challenge with his practical step-by-step approach. In its revised and expanded fifth edition, the book provides the reader with strategies for adding value to their enquiry-answering and would make a useful manual for any library service, small or large.

The book is structured around the concept that there are nine steps to successful enquiry answering and provides even the most experienced reference desk professionals with useful tips to refresh their skills and add value to their service, such as: getting started effectively, developing efficient search strategies, accessing the correct amount of information for the job, and how to meet deadlines every time. I would recommend this book even if it was only for the highly useful “the success at the enquiry desk enquiry form”. This makes an excellent guide for planning and delivering query results.

For each step of the process, Owen illustrates his points with practical examples, and structures each chapter with useful “to recap” dot points. This makes it a fantastic resource for all library and information management students who are aiming to work for the first time at the reference desk. He adds a final step, adding value to a library service, by suggesting ways to use completed enquiries to develop services further. Importantly, the book is written with a view to making the most of limited resources which is important to all Library professionals.

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Reserves, Electronic Reserves, and Copyright
Brice Austin
Haworth Information Press
New York, NY
2004
(Also published as Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery and

Keywords Copyright law, Reserves
Review DOI 10.1108/01435120710744263

Reserves have been in existence for a very long time and electronic reserves are now
widespread. Both have long been affected by copyright legislation. Brice Austin charts
the development of Reserves and their relationship to copyright in the United States.
The book, although specifically dealing with American copyright legislation and
therefore of less direct relevance to the Australia and the UK scene, is nevertheless a
very good read.

The author traces the history of Reserves from the 1870s to date. He reflects on
the introduction of copying in the 1940s and the wider acceptance of copying in
the late 1950s and early 1960s. He goes into detail about the 1978 and the 1982
USA copyright laws and their impact on Reserve. Course Reserves were not
mentioned specifically in the laws and this meant that fair use was often
interpreted very narrowly.

Electronic reserves came about in the mid-1990s. They offered relief from loss, theft
or damage. They provided better access for students, they resolved issues of space
limitations and they have reduced the need for re-shelving. However, copyright and
licensing issues are more difficult now than ever before.

The author considers the future of electronic reserves and defines three possible
scenarios. In the first, he suggests that as web-based course management systems
develop and academics rely on them more, Reserves may become irrelevant.
Furthermore, copyright legislation may make Reserves less desirable. Brice’s
second scenario sees Reserves as small print collections because everything is
available online or through course management systems. His third scenario relies
on strong leadership from information professionals in the area of copyright, as
well as collaboration and flexibility. This scenario sees expanded, multi-faceted
Reserve services.

In conclusion, the author suggests that we should strive as a profession to make
Reserves relevant.

For the USA reader, the book provides a well researched history of Reserves,
electronic reserves and copyright. Useful appendices are provided at the end of the
book, including the relevant section of the 1982 USA Copyright Law and other
guidelines that have been developed to assist in copyright interpretation.

For the non-USA reader, the book provides an interesting history of
Reserves and electronic reserves. It also provides a useful summary of current
issues.

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This slim, nine-chaptered *Building Bridges: Collaboration Within and Beyond the Academic Library*, in the Chandos Information Series, is a fast read of tips, techniques, and tools designed to help busy information professionals successfully undertake to collaborate with peers and faculty for internal and external projects. The several short case studies in the final four chapters offer little by way of new content for librarians who read case studies on collaboration published in journals such as *Library Management* or books such as *Working With Faculty to Design Undergraduate Information Literacy Programs*, by Rosemary M. Young and Stephena Harmony (Neal-Schuman Publishers, *How-to-Do-It Manuals for Librarians*, 1999).

Extensive lists of recent recommended articles for further reading conclude most chapters of the book. It is somewhat puzzling that none are offered for “Getting Started”, the fourth chapter, which covers general suggestions for planning projects, setting ground rules, creating timelines, and obtaining the necessary support from institutions and supervisors and external sources, if needed, for the financial and technological commitments needed for undertaking collaborative projects.

The authors have inserted quotations from leaders in various fields throughout the book’s text. These quotations may have had more impact to an international audience if brief explanations of the leaders’ roles and the sources of the quotations were provided, especially for those whose names are common in several occupations. In one case, the name of a late American political leader is misspelled. More careful editing, or proofreading, prior to publication would likely have eliminated the typographical and grammatical errors that detract from the advice and encouragement the authors offer to librarians wishing to undertake and succeed with collaborative efforts.

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