

ture information society. If libraries are indeed fulfilling their information mission, why do they have so little impact on published views of the future? This is a question that *The Knowledge Executive* does not even consider. Perhaps those concerned with the future of libraries should give it some thought.—Mary J. Cronin, *Loyola University Libraries, Chicago, Illinois.*

Costing and the Economics of Library and Information Services. Ed. by Stephen A. Roberts. London: Aslib, 1984. 349p. £20. ISBN 0-85142-176-8.

I am interested in how the falling cost of electronic systems may change the cost structures of libraries and so cause us to rethink how libraries function. I think of cost as a measure of the resources, human and otherwise, that are committed to a particular activity. When libraries commit resources to electronic systems, will the electronic activity so enhance library services that the library will receive a net increase in resources when it adds the electronic system? Or will the electronic system largely represent a shift in resources from conventional activities? I look to a study of library costing to shed light on this issue.

I am aware that academic libraries have competition. Most faculty members subscribe to some journals privately, buy and hold books personally, correspond with colleagues, and send and receive working papers. Often, departments have libraries—some just subscribe to a newspaper or a few journals; some are quite large and formal. Academic libraries themselves may operate as a single facility or as a constellation of libraries with some organizational superstructure. I would like to know what mix of private and collective action is best; what balance of central and distributed facilities achieves the highest level of net benefit? What is the total cost of information flows under each different pattern? What are we willing to pay for libraries under each pattern? Will electronic systems change the relative cost advantage and the pattern of willingness to pay for one pattern over others?

I turn for advice to the collection of essays under review. The questions I pose

are difficult and will not yield quickly to systematic investigation. I will find satisfaction if the volume provides sound guidance on how to address these questions.

There are some glimmers of insight here. Ross and Brooks' essay "Costing Manual and Computerized Library Circulation Systems" (1972) measures time (a resource) under an existing system and forecasts how much time will be required under an electronic system. They look at user time as well as library staff time, and so gauge willingness to pay as well as implementation expense. One would like to know the outcome. Now that electronic circulation systems are commonplace, why not report a before-and-after evaluation or a comparison of a library that has a manual system with one that has an electronic system? At least there is sound guidance as to method in the essay presented.

Bookstein's "Economic Model of Library Service" (no source is given for it) also has some good ideas. At an abstract level, the essay identifies a balance between cost and willingness to pay. Its strength is in identifying alternative decision-making regimes. It would be interesting to see these ideas made more concrete. If electronic systems are likely to be fee based while print remains with zero incremental charge, how will libraries evolve? Is such an evolution desirable?

Raffel's essay, "From Economic to Political Analysis of Library Decision Making" (1974), is useful. Conflicting interests will be resolved differently when consumers shop with dollars than when they shop with votes or influence. Willingness to pay depends on who's paying. I suspect, however, that who's paying is usually clearer than Raffel intimates. Libraries are often found in hierarchical environments where conflicts can be resolved at modest cost. In any event, analysis may narrow the scope of conflict.

Line's "Psychopathology of Unecconomics" (1979) is a light but wise essay on the foibles of library managers when confronted with changing costs.

Overall, however, this 347-page book is disappointing. Many of the essays are old. The median publication date of the articles

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is 1974. Several of the early essays mention punch-card based systems; none of the essays mention the possible use of spreadsheets as analytic tools. Some of the essays contain unit cost estimates for particular tasks, but these are denominated in currencies of a particular time that are difficult to compare to other times and places.

An issue of importance in assessing cost is when and how to allocate overhead costs to particular functions. Several essays muddle this issue, and no clear sense of it emerges. Perhaps the editor could have commissioned an essay or searched more widely to find an appropriate discourse on this subject. Several of the essays would be clarified by careful consideration of how to treat overhead.

The economic analysis here is sometimes shallow. Rowe's "Application of the Theory of the Firm to Library Costing" (1974) presents the idea of an optimal size of a library. It's an interesting concept, however, one gets no help in understanding why there may be an optimal size, and so there is no guidance offered as to how one might discover whether a library is too large or too small.

Ultimately, one's view of cost analysis should depend on one's goal. If one is interested in managerial efficiency, one may be interested in the details of cost accounting. One might address the question, could manager X perform as well as manager Y but with fewer resources? One will probably want to omit consideration of overhead outside the manager's control. One will be interested in work flows and timing individual tasks. Although this volume includes some discussion of work-flow measurement, it does not extend to the point of evaluating managerial efficiency. If one has a broader goal—a goal of understanding how costs may vary under organizations of different design or under different technologies—one will require more powerful techniques that are not considered in this volume. Because I am more interested in the larger questions of the cost structure, I get little satisfaction from this book.—*Malcolm Getz, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.*

Poole, Herbert L. *Theories of the Middle Range.* Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1985. 159p. \$29.50. LC 84-28402. ISBN 0-89391-257-3.

Poole's work argues the benefits and outlines the process of extracting middle-range theory from the library and information science literature. An extremely earnest style, heavily laden with sociological theory and philosophical formalisms, is immediately apparent in the text and is a constant reminder of the Ph.D. dissertation origin of this book.

As part of an introduction and justification of a need for theory, Poole cites authors who find a crisis of several parts within information science. Some feel that the field has no definition, others that its researchers lack meaningful direction. For some there are feelings that information science lacks legitimacy in the eyes of other disciplines because of its shaky and not particularly exclusive knowledge base. Poole and his authors suggest that librarians writing within the field may not be sensitive to this crisis because of the nature of library training and the library work place. Librarians in their view are busily service oriented, think in overconcrete terms, and do not seem to absorb the critical research design habits of their faculty customers—nor are they particularly well rewarded for those efforts that they do finally see to print.

Poole and his authorities are certainly aware and very critical of librarians' publications, particularly some use studies. They judge many of them to be attitude surveys, exhortations to diligence, isolated case reports, ill-planned statistical compilations, and the like. Poole believes that this state of affairs will persist in the profession and literature unless theory is used to organize and legitimize inquiry.

Poole is clear in what he expects of theory and of librarians/information scientists (hereafter, librarians). His grounded, middle-range theory will explain and predict information behavior and will even help to control and shape it. His type of theory is not top down, grand, or all encompassing, but is built upwards from factual particulars and has an intermediate domain of explanation. Poole expects