

# Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Regained? A Persistent Personnel Issue in Academic Librarianship, II

Allen B. Veaner

*Computerization has transformed the bulk of library work from moving physical objects, for example, producing, sorting, and filing catalog cards, to electronically manipulating a vast array of symbols. In so doing, it has transformed virtually all library employees into knowledge workers; the once-simple bifurcate division of employees into librarians and support staff seems no longer tenable. What, then is the proper role for the academic librarian? Cautioning against overenthusiastic endorsement of popular, industry-derived management methods, the author focuses on the intellectual character of academic librarianship and defines the concept of librarians' programmatic responsibilities. The author maintains that programmatic responsibilities are by definition undeleagatable and constitute an exclusive locus of power within the profession. The role of academic librarians—the design and management of information systems for the academic community—is determined by these exclusive programmatic responsibilities and related powers. To meet new conditions, academic librarianship requires a new manifesto derived directly from the academic community itself in preference to ready formulas from business and industry.*



Although C. C. Williamson raised the question of appropriate staffing in libraries over seventy years ago, in academic libraries the matter began to develop as a management problem only some forty years later when two powerful forces converged: the enormous expansion of higher education and the beginnings of national development

in library automation.<sup>1</sup> The concurrent achievement of faculty status by librarians, particularly in the newer public universities, brought the question into further relief.

The context of modern academic librarianship continues to change with extraordinary speed, owing to ever-accelerating technological development. The current panoply of digital devices

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and services ranges far beyond the wild-est imaginings of the most optimistic futurists of even a decade ago. New wonders now appear so routinely that Vannevar Bush's fabled Memex seems almost within reach. We also see the commercial sector making a serious bid for the library's traditional turf. Inside academe, we see continuing unmistakable movement toward integration of computer and library services into a single entity that can broadcast or narrow-cast information and data. We observe a sea change in graduate education for our field as more and more library schools are closed; those that remain are reviewing their missions or shifting program foci. These events interact powerfully with the roles of staff at all levels and are altering roles and relationships rapidly and irrevocably.

In 1982 the present author pointed to the increasing awareness of the developing stresses between librarians and support staff, the rise of role blurring, and the migration of complex work downward in the work hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> In 1988 Charles Lowry observed that all of librarianship had been transformed into a capital-intensive, high-technology light industry, something quite different from its recent circumstance as a labor-intensive craft workshop—a structural change implying different personnel arrangements.<sup>3</sup> In two important papers published in 1992 Larry Oberg carefully traced the emergence of paraprofessionals in academic libraries, surveyed their role, status, and working conditions, and concluded that the role identity problem had become acute.<sup>4,5</sup> A review of current literature, conference programs, and network communications makes clear why: in a relatively brief time computerization has wrought a dramatic, unexpected and unintended transformation in the work environment—virtually all employees of academic libraries in reality have become knowledge workers. Work classification schemes have not fully caught up with this new reality; the once-easy bipolar division of staff into librarians and support personnel has become uncertain

and subject to much questioning. Indeed, within ACRL's discussion group, Personnel Administrators and Staff Development Officers of Large Research Libraries, the proper allocation of work is often the subtext for major deliberation on topics having quite different names. Far from reaching an easy accommodation, the tensions and irritations within the academic community have increased to the point where personnel officers see this issue as more and more complex, increasingly vexing, and unlikely to go away. It may now be appropriate to reexamine the factors distinguishing the several strata of staff in the academic library and their respective responsibilities. This paper reviews current trends and attempts a response.

A good starting point is the general perception of librarians. Among lay people, sometimes within various layers of government and—regrettably—sometimes within academe itself, there often remains puzzlement over what librarians do and a troubling perception that whatever it is, almost anyone can do it. After informing people that we are librarians, we have all occasionally received the blank look and the questions, not always articulated: "Well, what do you actually do?" Or: "Does your work really require graduate education?" Increasingly, we face these questions from our campus administrations, from rival factions on campus, from our governing boards, and from the politicians in the state legislatures. Why are librarians—specifically academic librarians—perceived so vaguely? I see at least five reasons for this uncertain role identity.

**Failure to Socialize Ourselves Adequately to the Academic Community.** In the past we often focused far more on rules, codes, and procedures than on intellectual substance, leadership, and management responsibilities. More recently and more importantly, we have failed to explain to the academic politicians to whom we report the nature of the value we add to information, or even that we add value. These types of misfocus communicated a weak image to important campus constituencies and,

to the extent that they endure, continue to do so.

**Failure to Define our Responsibilities to the Public at Large.** We like to believe that libraries and librarians have an obvious intrinsic value. Thus we reinforce—by default—the popular concept that libraries are self-organizing entities that function more or less automatically without any need for professional leadership.

In librarianship and information management, commercial exploitation of high technology has been evident for some time and is becoming increasingly vigorous. In a strongly worded piece Bruce Park suggests there is a danger that new technology can marginalize librarians—make us inessential—much as the computer has already marginalized surveying work and made the old-fashioned surveyor obsolete, and as programs like AutoCad have outmoded mechanical drafting.<sup>6</sup>

**Reluctance to promote ourselves contributes heavily to our low visibility and helps convey the notion that libraries and librarians, while fairly harmless, are quite simply dispensable.**

In an equally forthright paper S. Michael Malinconico rails against the stubbornly held, romantic concept that the value of the library is or should be self-evident to the client:

... the worth of quality library and information services cannot be assumed to be intrinsically obvious to everyone—not even to those on whose behalf the services are performed. Unless librarians can articulate the value they add to the efforts of others, they cannot expect them to divine the value of what librarians do. It is essential that librarians communicate with nonlibrarians about what they do.<sup>7</sup>

Both Park and Malinconico convincingly illustrate what a poor job we have done of educating the public about our profession and of politicking with the

power brokers. More recently, in a hard-hitting guest editorial, "Political Networking," Karyle Butcher likewise faults the profession for failing to market itself effectively: "We have not translated what we do into words that make sense to the majority of taxpayers."<sup>8</sup> Assumed value is not likely to be an effective weapon either in information turf wars or in budget battles.

**A Damaging Reluctance to Take Due Credit.** Unlike lawyers and doctors, librarians have modesty in spades; self-effacement has been our creed. But if we do not trumpet who we are and remain unsure of what our duties and responsibilities are and from whence they originate, how can we expect others to understand the vitality of our role? Reluctance to promote ourselves contributes heavily to our low visibility and helps convey the notion that libraries and librarians, while fairly harmless, are quite simply dispensable.

**A Persistent and Pervasive Pentant for Denial.** Because we dislike any paradigm that looks elitist, hierarchical, or otherwise stratified, we tend to deny layered structures. Most of us come from a liberal tradition; we like equality and democracy. But higher education is not democracy and denial of academic Realpolitik weakens our capacity to participate in normal campus infighting.

**Devaluation of Work Done in a Largely Feminized Profession.** The pernicious denigration of "women's work," treated at length by Roma Harris, helps maintain a stereotype of librarianship as an unsubstantial line of work.<sup>9</sup>

#### IMPACT OF CHANGED TECHNOLOGICAL CONTEXT

It is a commonplace that the computer has radically altered the way we do things in libraries. Certainly the mechanics of our processes, the physical activities, have changed totally. But the watershed to which the computer has brought librarianship reaches far beyond a simple mechanical impact on methods and procedures. When most employees are transformed into knowledge workers, work itself changes and

the nature of power in the organization is altered; both are redistributed. During the past two decades we have seen complex procedures continually move downward in the work hierarchy and ever more complex abstract work move steadily upward. Whole categories of work have totally disappeared and are no longer even available for assignment to a lower level of staffing. Work itself has become more and more complex, more intellectually demanding—exactly opposite to the expectations of early automation pioneers. E-mail has given all staff greatly increased powers of communication. Information that was once the private preserve of middle-level managers is now gathered and analyzed by computer and is available to almost anyone at a terminal. Beyond work procedures themselves, management "turf" has also been redistributed: many decisions that once required a librarian-supervisor's intervention are now routinely and effectively made by support staff. These radical shifts are characterized by two aspects, one distributive and the other preemptive.

#### *Distributive and Preemptive Aspects of Change*

For a long time the academic library held its clients as a virtually captive market—much as IBM did in data processing and the Big Three in automobiles. Now the distributive aspect of change has destroyed the old centrality of the catalog, the computer center and even the library itself. The breakdown of this former information service monopoly has weakened the librarian's gatekeeping function. Inside the library we have trained a great many support staff to become information workers; they operate systems, provide services, and understand complexities which heretofore were known only to members of the trade. Outside, entrepreneurs with a few dollars and some relatively inexpensive hardware and software can acquire (or access) databases and claim a capacity to provide information services. But these "providers" need not possess graduate education, talent, professional dedica-

tion, or personal integrity. With its constant attention to profits, the commercial sector is not obliged to supply the kind of social and intellectual value librarians add to information: critical evaluation of sources, open interplay of intellectual freedom and the wide spectrum of opinion and fact, freedom from the narrowing influences of specific ideologies, concern for equal access regardless of financial capacity—in short, the total service ethic. The preemptive aspect of the new technological context is straightforward: methodological shift is unidirectional. One cannot retain or return to old ways.

In many ways this preemptive aspect is hardly a concern; indeed, who would want to return to the old ways? But the distributive aspect offers both opportunity and hazard. The opportunity is obvious, but why is there any hazard? Because funders are politicians—not information technologists or information professionals—it is relatively easy for business to sell products, systems, and services to them. Whether the politicians are in academe or in government is irrelevant; there is not that much difference.

In the real world when bureaucrat and technologist meet, perception very often outpowers reality. In commerce the best products do not necessarily garner the highest sales—observe how hype sells software. Hence it is easy for those in power to make a wrong choice. If we librarians keep a low profile and maintain an indistinct picture of who we are and what we do, we contribute to the confusion and, ultimately, almost guarantee that the politicians will choose the wrong systems and the wrong staff mix for providing information to the scholarly and general publics. Many system and software vendors think they already have a very good idea of how to displace knowledgeable (but comparatively expensive) people and make a great deal of profit while doing it. Such commercial providers are usually driven entirely by the marketplace and lack the values that librarians have internalized through their graduate education and socialization to a profession.

These distributive and preemptive changes coupled to an unclear picture of our role bring us to the key question of who academic librarians are and the nature of the work they actually perform.

### THE CRITICAL ISSUE: DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES— WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

There are four aspects to the pivotal issues of who librarians are, what they do, and from whence their responsibilities come: the concept of the library program, the distinction between position and job, the ideas of programmatic responsibilities and programmatic leadership, and the failed concept of enumerated task lists.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Primacy of the Library Program*

The foundation of librarianship as a profession lies fundamentally in the concept of the library program, which I have defined elsewhere as follows:

A program is a mental construct, directive in character and emerging from an institution's mission, goals and objectives, that determines what an institution spends its money on, who is authorized to spend that money, and how it may be spent.<sup>11</sup>

To focus this concept as sharply as possible I have coined the expression "programmatic responsibilities," and to concentrate the idea further, I maintain that an academic library program is an exclusive locus of authority and power—it is not something equally distributed among every constituency in the workplace.

#### *Distinction between Position and Job*

Even though nearly everyone in an academic library is now a knowledge worker, I maintain that there are substantive differences between what librarians ought to do and what support staff ought to do and that these differences can be defined. If we do not accept some kind of distinction as axiomatic, we must surrender any claim that librarianship is a profession: work that can be done by anyone cannot be professional. To help characterize these differ-

ences I define a distinction between position and job.<sup>12</sup> The difference is intimately related to the concepts of programmatic leadership and programmatic responsibilities:

A position is a node of power and influence over the organization's program in that it represents the opportunity to make choices and decisions that influence the direction in which the organization moves. Job is a construct altogether different. . . . It is much more specific . . . being tied to definite, usually assigned responsibilities.<sup>13</sup>

There is yet one more aspect to the difference between position and job. Obviously every employed person "spends" money simply by virtue of drawing a salary. But this is not an expenditure in the programmatic sense. Librarians, by virtue of their positions, possess an authority beyond the pro forma and are charged with the *decisive* responsibility to spend money. They can decide to spend it on X and not on Y. Because programmatic responsibilities are broad, generic, and wide-ranging, librarians' expenditure decisions impinge upon the library as a totality, not merely upon one or a few narrow aspects or procedures. Their programmatic decisions normally arise from a collegial base, from deliberations that focus upon a school's entire academic program and that typically involve specific, conscious consultation with their peers—faculty and administration—and with their clients—students as well as faculty and the general public.

#### *Concepts of Programmatic Responsibilities and Programmatic Leadership*

This *decisive*—as distinct from the merely procedural—power to change direction, to reallocate resources, to alter a program, to create a new program, to focus on the entire library, to take risks—this gestalt I have termed *programmatic responsibility*. Precisely because a program is an exclusive locus of power and a fully academic matter, I further maintain that programmatic responsibilities cannot be delegated to nonacademic

staff. Only librarians can exercise programmatic responsibilities—including programmatic leadership, which is the duty to change or adapt the library's program and organization to fit new conditions—even to destabilize, to tear down, and from the remains reconstruct a completely new program. In higher education programmatic responsibilities emerge from the highest levels of academic decision making—from the office of the provost, dean, academic vice president, or similar officer. Correspondingly, a librarian's specific duties and responsibilities emerge from the library program which, in turn, emerges from a school's mission, goals, objectives, and curriculum. In fact, the library program is as much an academic affair as curriculum itself and responsibility for development of the former exactly parallels the faculty's exclusive responsibility for the latter.

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In short, a librarian's programmatic responsibilities *inhere in the position*. Such responsibilities require a broad understanding of national and international library issues, continuous self-development, and a willingness to participate in governance, research, publication, and professional association affairs. Additionally, every librarian position is characterized by generic duties and responsibilities, of which attention to the library program is by far the most vital. Librarians cannot "not" be responsible for the library program any more than faculty can ignore responsibility for research, teaching, and curriculum. No matter how narrowly circumscribed their work, librarians cannot opt out of broad programmatic responsibilities, cannot claim "they're not in my job description." Ernest Ingles, chief librarian of the University of Alberta, has formulated an attractive co-

nundrum to articulate the nature of a librarian's duties and responsibilities. According to Ingles, "Everything is assigned and nothing is assigned," a formulation I call Ingles' paradox.<sup>14</sup>

Ingles' paradox cannot be applied to staff who perform classified work no matter how complex the procedures. Classified work is definitely assigned, and those who occupy classified slots are not free to work at will on responsibilities outside their job descriptions. Nonexempt staff cannot take on professional duties or programmatic responsibilities without appropriate compensation and status. However, if nonexempt staff are permitted consistently to perform exempt work, two choices could be invoked: either the employee's work responsibilities could be scaled back to the original job description or the work could be redefined and the incumbent's position reconstituted as exempt and paid accordingly, in conformity with established arbitration and judicial rulings. I have no problem with the latter if it is the will of the administration, the institution has the financial resources to cope, and the employee is of proven ability. Correspondingly, one might be forced to demote or reclassify librarians unwilling or unable to fulfill the comprehensive programmatic responsibilities that inhere in their exempt positions.

***Inappropriateness of Task Lists as Position or Job Determinants***

Tasks and responsibilities are two entirely different concepts. Discrete, assigned tasks are exactly that—no more, no less. Programmatic responsibilities are abstract entities of a generic character; relatively independent of changing technology, they comprehend the entire spectrum of an institution's mission and character. Thus, to distinguish the work of librarians and support staff it is best to abandon enumerated task lists. *Technology keeps changing tasks*. A task list is almost immediately out of date when issued and therefore is essentially irrelevant as a tool for distinguishing librarians from support staff. Additionally, when most staff have become knowl-

edge workers, the line between respective tasks can become very fuzzy. Finally, because the wide scope of a librarian's work comprises a gestalt, an enumeration of finite tasks is more hindrance than help in defining the librarian's role in higher education.

### ACADEME AS A STRATIFIED SOCIETY

I now wish to return to that earlier point on stratification within academe, a matter that often invokes denial because we are reluctant to admit involvement with anything undemocratic. Yet the college and university are among the most undemocratic institutions in our society; inequality is conspicuous, rampant, and undisguised in academe, but some persist in denying it.<sup>15</sup>

An anecdote from my experience in the University of California illustrates the pervasive reluctance to accept stratification. When I took up my position as university librarian at the Santa Barbara campus, I found support staff attending meetings of the Senate Library Committee as if by right, an arrangement that if not sanctioned by the librarians, was certainly not questioned. Investigating university statutes to see who had the right to attend Senate committee meetings, I found universally that only faculty members were part of the process—except for the library committee, where the university librarian was the sole *ex officio* nonfaculty member. But no rank-and-file librarian—and certainly no support staff member—was entitled to participate in Senate library committee meetings, nor was anyone except faculty eligible for membership on any other Senate committee. There was absolutely no question about the uniqueness and exclusivity of the faculty's powers.

With faculty permission I arranged to have selected librarians invited in accordance with the agenda but ceased to invite support staff. Challenged by support staff in an open meeting, I cited the statutes of the university and, explaining that faculty were extremely jealous of their prerogatives, affirmed that they did not provide for nonacademic staff to

participate in their proceedings. One support staff member asked: "Don't you think that's an awfully elitist attitude?" I replied: "Absolutely!!! The University of California is an elitist institution!" This response was not received with enthusiasm. But it reflects the undeniable reality of elitism in the university community.

Elitism is part of what higher education is all about: the college and university experience bestows lifetime advantages upon a select group willing to sacrifice, work, study, and learn. The faculty/staff/student trichotomy is fundamental and remains highly durable. In parallel with this trichotomy, library support for academe has evolved into a layered structure with different categories of employees holding widely differing responsibilities. Management holds different expectations for each group, and there are differences in authority, responsibility, pay, and privilege. The academic library's mission—a maximum of information and service for all its clients—may be democratic but the system for achieving that mission is not. Yet our taste for democracy in every facet of life is very great, and it is comforting to deny any embodiment of hierarchy and stratification. Our readiness to accept elitism in competitive enterprise—sports, the arts, and entertainment—is an interesting contrast.

Elitism implies exclusivity and there is nothing shameful about an exclusive responsibility. All kinds of licensed professionals bear exclusive responsibilities. If we distribute programmatic responsibilities broadcast, we deny our professionalism—and that is tantamount to saying that anyone can do a librarian's work. *Merwine versus Mississippi State University* should have settled that claim.

To summarize this point: if my construct about exclusivity and programmatic responsibilities is not valid, then there is little or no difference between librarians and support staff. All knowledge workers would be equal. From this it follows straightaway that work that can be done by anyone does not require a span of levels, roles, and responsibilities. The parallel in other fields is immediate:

there would be no differences between M.D.'s and R.N.'s, attorneys and paralegals, and between civil engineers and anyone with a PC who knew how to use AutoCad software.

All human beings deserve respect. Neither the concept of *programmatically responsibilities* nor the exclusive locus of power idea means that we cannot receive or solicit input from support staff or that we should fail to respect them. Quite the contrary: to achieve the library's mission and goals effectively and economically, input is required from every staff level. Everyone certainly deserves to be respected and every employee merits opportunity for advancement.<sup>16</sup>

Nor does a staffing dichotomy mean that librarians are better people than support staff or more valuable to the library or that support staff lack capacity. I have said many times that libraries could function for quite a while without librarians but would collapse in an instant without support staff whose presence and dedication are absolutely essential. Everyone—including the janitor—helps run the library and every employee projects the library's role and value to the public. But different categories of employees have different, noninterchangeable responsibilities.

#### IMPACT OF VOGUE MANAGEMENT METHODS

Within the past decade or so a great many methods have been taken over from industry and commerce and become politically correct in business personnel management and in government. These concepts are having a definite impact on the academic library. The current inventory of politically correct terms includes concepts such as *teamwork*, *empowerment*, *total quality management (TQM)*, *statistical quality control*, *liberation management*, and the likely newest one, *Fourth Generation Management*.<sup>17</sup> Three vogue concepts—flat organizations, teamwork, and empowerment—plus the influential work of W. Edwards Deming—are worth brief discussion.

**Flat Organizations.** Some say, "Flat organizations are best; we need to end

hierarchy." Unfortunately, the totally flat organization does not function effectively because nobody knows who's in charge and it is virtually impossible to achieve accountability. This concept, tried in the 1960s, has had no general success. Recently several major computer and software companies—Apple, AutoDesk, and Thinking Machines—have concluded that organizational flatness and loose management styles contribute to a lack of focus in marketing and indecision in major policy areas. One result is comparatively flat profits; all have adjusted their organizations accordingly.<sup>18</sup> The challenge of excellence in organizational intercommunication is not met by the seemingly easy solution of flatness.

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**Teamwork.** In an organization as complex as the academic library it would be impossible to achieve anything if staff did not work together. Library staffs worked together effectively and harmoniously for a very long time before managers applied the *team* label to group activity. But merely calling all employees *associates* and redesignating work styles as *teamwork* are no guarantee of success.<sup>19</sup>

Peter Drucker distinguishes three different types of teams (that cannot be intermixed) and points out that selecting the correct type is essential to increasing the productivity of knowledge workers.<sup>20</sup> His first type is the baseball team—analogue to the factory production line. Here the players play on a team but not as a team—no player can deviate from his/her assigned responsibility. This scheme is clearly inappropriate to the academic library where (ideally) flexibility, interdependence, adaptability, and exchange of assignment are routine among both librarians and support



staff. Drucker's second team type is the soccer team, which he compares to the symphony orchestra and characterizes as a team having one boss whose word is law. The players follow a score or game plan, and endless rehearsal is required for effectiveness. Such a construct would be totally ineffective in academe where independence and autonomy are extremely powerful (making *rehearsal* a meaningless term), and where unforeseeable demands can easily derail any preconceived "game plan." Additionally, the *one-boss-whose-word-is-law* idea is not going to be accepted in any college or university. Drucker's third type is the doubles tennis team where players have enormous flexibility and are expected to "cover" for each other. The doubles tennis model, he states, has to be small—not more than seven to nine persons—and does not work well until its members have functioned together for a long time. This last type, which Drucker considers the strongest of all teams, can hardly be enlarged holus-bolus to involve all library employees. The management of an entity as complex as an academic library cannot be undertaken by a committee of the whole (except perhaps in small college libraries). Indeed, Drucker's preferred team structure sounds very much like the library director and his/her chief aides—the model long in place! But in reality, none of Drucker's models precisely embodies the academic library management team.

A team-centered approach is invaluable, indeed indispensable, in sports, manufacturing, sales, and the military. But except for mission-centered research—such as weapons development or space exploration—teamwork is an exceptional phenomenon in academe, especially in the humanities. Even in the sciences, faculty and researchers use team approaches with great reluctance because of concerns about rank, status, prestige, and priority in discovery and publication.<sup>21</sup> One can find many examples to illustrate minimal teamwork in academe; the battle over credit for isolation of the AIDS virus is notable. Faculty who do use teams often staff them with

subordinates, like low-paid graduate students. Generally, faculty are not team players; as autonomous professionals they are quite rivalrous. Rivalry among librarians is also fairly common.

In the library, there is certainly important work that can be done by teams. The RECON projects of the past two decades are among the best examples; so is the current area of software training. But the vital programmatic responsibilities tend to be more individualized, tailored to the incumbent's education, talents, and professional responsibilities, and geared to serve other campus programs which, after all, compete for the same institutional dollars as does the library.<sup>22</sup>

In short, I believe that in academe the team concept—especially the idea of the autonomous self-directed team—though seductive, is simply too facile:

The challenge in academe is not to build a "team" but to develop a style of cooperative independence uniting diverse interests into the achievement of common goals—without destroying or weakening opportunity for individual growth and development. This is a vastly more difficult challenge than team building in the corporate world.<sup>23</sup>

Finding a truly innovative and durable team model for academic librarianship—a model that goes beyond Drucker's preferred type—remains an elusive goal.<sup>24</sup>

One final comment on teams: their legality may be questionable. On December 17, 1992, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that work teams may be considered as company unions—especially if they deal with scheduling, work rotation, or pay-for-performance. Also, legitimate unions may view teams as diminishing or threatening their power.

**Empowerment.** Like the teaching and research faculty, librarians are already empowered. Their academic status has endowed them with programmatic responsibilities—the authority and the obligation to redirect, reconstruct, and reconstitute an institution's library service program. I have three comments on the general notion of empowerment:

- Not everyone can be equally empowered. (The janitor is normally not assigned to collection development.)
- For some librarians "empowerment" might just mean fulfilling the responsibilities they already hold—but may not be carrying out.
- Some people—including some librarians—do not want to be empowered, for it would mean they might actually have to make some choices and be held accountable for them.

A legitimate question is to what extent support staff can be empowered. What does empowerment really mean for those who do not and cannot have programmatic responsibilities? Empowerment cannot have the same meaning for all categories of employees. To suggest that it can is self-deception.

Donald Riggs, a vigorous proponent of empowerment, suggests that TQM (Total Quality Management) "empowers people by trusting all library staff to act responsibly and giving them proper authority."<sup>25</sup> Riggs' choice of words—"proper authority"—is noteworthy. However, I have problems with his suggestion that one should "trust everyone to act responsibly." If that could be done, the ACRL Personnel Administrators and Staff Development Officers of Large Research Libraries Discussion Group would not exist, nor would many similar groups. The work of library personnel officers would be confined to simple, bureaucratic tasks—paper pushing at best—and a staff of self-supervising employees would require no managers.

**W. Edwards Deming's Management Views.** The philosophy of statistical quality control promoted by W. Edwards Deming, one of the distinguished parents of Japan's productivity achievements, has exerted a preeminent though tardy influence in North America. One is reluctant to be negative when there is so much of value in his views: drive out fear; be a coach and colleague—not a judgmental critic; drive out adversarial confrontation by designing win-win strategies; pay is not a motivator; pride and joy are the best rewards; optimize the whole system. Are these

not the general principles of all good management?

But Deming's view that management should not come from the top is not a good fit to the academic world. Higher education is not the factory; both management and leadership have *got to come from the top*, from those who hold and exercise programmatic responsibilities, specifically administration, chief academic officers, and faculty. Within the library, the corresponding agents of programmatic evaluation and change are librarians, the chief librarian, and principal deputies.

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#### What does empowerment really mean for those who do not and cannot have programmatic responsibilities?

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Deming states that action without knowledge is useless, that "experience teaches nothing," because without theory there is no learning. This very valuable observation supports the necessity and value of graduate education for librarianship; it also supports the notion that professional staff and support staff exercise qualitatively different responsibilities.

In brief, I am very critical of all business management derivatives—they tend to be deterministic, highly reductive, and transient.<sup>26</sup> But I do not suggest that we cannot learn from business and industry or should not apply appropriate business techniques to managing academic libraries. The key is in the words *appropriate* and *proper*. If we adopt or adapt inappropriate techniques—or delegate our exclusive programmatic responsibilities to nonacademic staff—we risk reading ourselves out of existence, or at best marginalizing our profession.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Allocation of duties and responsibilities among knowledge workers involves weighty policy issues such as pay equity and the designation of exempt and non-exempt status—important issues beyond the scope of this paper. Although these policy questions sometimes have a

strong emotional content, how we feel matters very little. The legal consequences of these decisions are the domain of the chief librarian, the personnel officer, and the parent institution's administrators. There are many other issues germane to our central question, but they are also far beyond the range of this paper: motivation, leadership, cultural diversity, supervision, performance appraisal, advancement, staff and career development. We cannot, however, allow these additional important considerations to confound our thinking about the central issues: who librarians are, what they do, and where their programmatic duties and responsibilities originate. Nor can we ignore the fact that despite the transformation of most employees into "knowledge workers," the academic work environment is still firmly set up for duality, not for a "creeping continuity" where different responsibilities can slide unnoticeably from one category of employee to another.

To sum up, the following main points represent my conclusions about academic librarians and academic librarianship.

1. A librarian's work is cerebral and indeterminate, rarely being the application of some fixed formula or procedure. Each new client or new problem is a new intellectual challenge that is met with a fresh, inventive response—not by reference to some canonical "body of knowledge." A librarian's work cannot be disaggregated into the convenient series of tasks so beloved of work analysts. A librarian's work is far closer to the faculty's teaching and research than to anything subject to industrial work analysis.<sup>27</sup> Like other knowledge professionals—surgeons, lawyers, economists, scientists, professors—librarians are intimately involved with the interactive dynamics and unpredictable outcomes of living systems, for example, other people and society as a whole.
2. Because our realm is the life of the mind, we need to focus primarily upon librarianship's mental and

intellectual content, to understand and communicate that our intellectual and teaching work is neither exportable nor delegatable. (Nor is it assignable to a software package.) The kind of work that can be exported to low-wage countries or transferred downward in a work hierarchy is almost always procedural, manual work. As such work is removed from librarians, new intellectual challenges rise to fill the void.

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**A librarian is not hired to "do a job" but to be and become a certain kind of person—ideally a partner with faculty and student in both the teaching and research aspects of higher education.**

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To focus this second point to the utmost: academic librarianship involves intangible mental work that must be done by educated people who hold unique responsibilities for program, leadership, and teaching and who, like faculty, exercise an exclusive locus of power. Librarians add to their work ethical and nonmonetary values not obtainable elsewhere. A librarian is not hired to "do a job" but to be and become a certain kind of person—ideally a partner with faculty and student in both the teaching and research aspects of higher education. Willis Hubbard says it neatly:

... academic librarians are not in the business of librarianship, but of teaching. If we do not find ways to form new alliances with faculty, we run the serious risk of becoming marginalized professionally and economically ...<sup>28</sup>

W. Bede Mitchell and Bruce Morton, in a recent *C&RL* paper, have succinctly stated about the professoriate what is precisely true about academic librarianship: "It is a commitment to a transcendent academic culture, to an intellectual community, and to the pursuit of inquiry."<sup>29</sup>

3. We must rid ourselves of self-imposed modesty. We must make

ourselves the visible "information navigators." We must convince the funders that real, live, well-paid librarians are indispensable to the organization. Let us proudly affirm that we are the information experts, the institution's key knowledge workers.

4. Only librarians can redesign, reconstruct, and redirect library programs. Only librarians can determine decisively how to design and spend the library budget. In my opinion, these two sentences say it all and everything else about the allocation of work to the several categories of knowledge employees follows from this. This is no magic bullet, but simply a firm statement of principle.
5. Academic librarianship is an academic service business—not a bibliographic factory. Because we deal with the entire universe, our work tends to be messy, our procedures rarely algorithmic. Because we cater to human creativity, demand is variable and unpredictable, our work difficult or impossible to schedule systematically. Unlike wheat or sand, our products and services are not fungible. Our products and services are invariably unique to our clients. Clients do not come back to us for "more" information as customers go to the supermarket for more cereal or toothpaste. This is the main reason we should stop looking to the commercial world for some trendy formula to solve all our personnel management and organizational problems. We must look within our own unique environment for solutions that fit the very peculiar body academic.

There is no evidence that the fundamentally hierarchical structure of higher education is soon going to be overthrown and transformed into some egalitarian organism. Consequently, there can be no mandate to coalesce the academic library staff into a single, undifferenti-

ated class. The personnel aspects of contemporary academic librarianship continue to follow a long tradition of duality: a staff of librarians and other specialists plus support staff. Furthermore, it is clear that the growing complexity of the world of information demands more, not fewer, experts.

Yet as technology uplifts all levels of employees, turning more and more of them into information workers—symbol manipulators rather than movers of physical objects—one must ask whether traditional personnel arrangements can or should survive. I have already suggested that the paradigm of employment duality in academic libraries might one day be viewed as an outmoded "inheritance from an industrial society . . . no longer . . . appropriate to an information society," and that "in the next century technology may drive a radical restructuring of work in the information field . . ." <sup>30,31</sup> Maureen Sullivan has suggested that some altogether new construct may develop from the confluence of technical and social factors in library work—perhaps the emergence of two parallel career streams: librarians on the academic/programmatic side and, on the support side, information specialists. <sup>32</sup> However, at this time the mechanism for advancing such a change is not clear, nor is it yet certain that such a change is even desirable. We need to watch closely how academe itself responds to technological imperatives, financial constraints, and demographic change. Will higher education remain the primary socializing experience for the nation's future scholars and leaders—as it has for centuries—or will it devolve into a completely different entity? Whatever higher education becomes, librarianship, as a support instrument, is likely to reflect the parent institution's structure.

Despite very rapid, technology-driven change, I conclude that for the foreseeable future, higher education will continue to require a dedicated cadre of special appointees—librarians—expressly charged to design and manage information systems for faculty,

students, and other researchers. To achieve that result, academic librarians must continue to hold, enhance, and vigorously exercise their programmatic responsibilities while maintaining an exclusive locus of power in parallel with faculty.

In all eras and in all societies information has always been the most powerful and most fundamental social and technical resource, but only now is this fact being universally recognized. Only now has technology for the commercial exploitation of information been developed to the point where it can compete with librarianship. It is in this context

that we must redefine and redesign academic librarianship and rethink the entire spectrum of staffing and appropriate personnel utilization. Change in the structure of academic librarianship should be an outcome of librarians' programmatic leadership and not something that occurs by default or through the courts. In short, academic librarianship urgently needs a completely new manifesto. We must devise one quickly—before our role is preempted. If we cannot forge our own destiny in the information arena, some other force will do it. Neither we nor our clients may care for the result.

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3. Charles B. Lowry, "A Convergence of Technologies: How Will Libraries Adapt?" *Library Administration and Management* 2 (Mar. 1988): 77–84.
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8. Karyle Butcher, "Political Networking," *College & Research Libraries* 54 (July 1993): 291–92.
9. Roma M. Harris, *Librarianship: The Erosion of a Woman's Profession* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex: 1992).
10. Much of the following is based upon arguments developed in detail in my book, *Academic Librarianship in a Transformational Age: Program, Politics, and Personnel* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990).
11. *Ibid.*, 167.
12. My terms *position* and *job* are here defined for the sake of a general argument; they may not be similarly defined by career personnel specialists who must often work within the context of legislative constraint or established usage.
13. Veaner, *Academic Librarianship*, 70–71. All employees hold responsibilities, of course, but those held by librarians are broad and generic, not discrete or precisely designated.
14. Ernest Ingles, personal communication.
15. An exceptionally lucid picture of the inequalities in academe is in Henry Rosovsky's *The University: An Owner's Manual* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990).
16. Opportunity for advancement is not necessarily within the library, however, as indefinite upward mobility in any organization is an obvious impossibility.
17. These vogue terms have a very high mortality rate; one can dimly recall PPBS (Program Planning & Budgeting System), ZBB (Zero Based Budgeting), QC (Quality Circles), etc.
18. For the story on Thinking Machines, see Glenn Rifkin's "Computer Maker Fills a Top Post" in *New York Times*, Aug. 30, 1993, Section C, 1, 3.
19. See Aimee L. Stern's critical analysis of the failures and difficulties of team management in industry in *New York Times*, July 18, 1993, Section 3, 5.
20. Peter F. Drucker, *Post-Capitalist Society* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1993), 83–90.

21. Large recent losses in U.S. federal support for science may change this old pattern and force greater cooperation among researchers.
22. Veaner, *Academic Librarianship*, 197-203.
23. *Ibid.*, 101.
24. David A. Baldwin and Robert L. Migneault, in their forthcoming work, *Humanistic Management by Teamwork: An Organizational and Administrative Alternative for Academic Libraries* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1994), propose a hybrid of hierarchy and teamstyle organization to resolve some of the problems of traditional styles.
25. Donald E. Riggs, "TQM: Quality Improvement in New Clothes," *College & Research Libraries* 53 (Nov. 1992): 481-83.
26. Even industry is tiring of trendy management, productivity, and compensation "solutions" promised by techniques variously named *reengineering*, *benchmarking*, *worker empowerment*, *team management*, *broadbanding*, *skill-based pay*, and *total quality management*. The new fashions appear to be comparatively short-lived, are often abandoned, or require modification and, in some cases, even expensive antidotes. See "Many Companies Try Management Fads, Only to See Them Flop," *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 1993, A1.
27. The words *task* and *job* cannot accurately describe the largely invisible mental and cognitive work that is the librarian's domain. It would be a blessing if we could get rid of both task and job to characterize the work of librarians, though it is evident that within the bureaucracy of state-supported institutions this would be very difficult, perhaps impossible.
28. Willis Hubbard, "Shifting Paradigms for Librarians," *College & Research Libraries News* 53 (Dec. 1992): 708.
29. W. Bede Mitchell and Bruce Morton, "On Becoming Faculty Librarians: Acculturation Problems and Remedies," *College & Research Libraries* 53 (Sept. 1992): 380.
30. Veaner, *Academic Librarianship*, 74.
31. See also the introduction to Peter Drucker's *Post-Capitalist Society* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1993), 1-16.
32. Maureen Sullivan, personal communication.

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