Library administration & new management systems

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"The real danger with... management systems is that they offer mechanistic formulas for dealing with complex realities and keep us from thinking about and solving our management problems in practical, realistic, and common sense ways"

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN, Moliër's Bourgeois Gentilhomme, was surprised and pleased to learn that he had been speaking prose all his life without knowing it. I felt the same way when I finally learned that I had been a manager for 20 years without knowing it. Well, I always knew that I was a library administrator, but somehow I never thought of myself as a manager because that term connoted a kind of modern professionalism that the more familiar term administrator lacked.

Ten years ago I attended the University of Maryland's excellent two-week development program for library administrators and was deeply impressed by the introductory courses and readings which covered the full range of subjects like McGregor's Theories X and Y, Management by Objectives (MBO), Program Budgeting (PPBS), Decision Theory, Cost-Benefit Analysis, Mathematical Modelling, Management Information Systems, etc. I came away thinking, somewhat naively, that business and other managers had mastered and were routinely using that arsenal of sophisticated management systems and techniques in their daily work, and that it was only library and perhaps academic administrators that were struggling along with the traditional methods. It was clear that we librarians had a lot of catching-up to do.

It was with some hesitation that I accepted the directorship of a large library in 1970 because I believed that research libraries were becoming increasingly costly and complex organizations and that I lacked the formal management training and skills that the job required. Determined to remedy my lack of formal training, I enrolled in the Harvard Business School's Advanced Management Program, a prestigious and expensive three-month program especially designed for high-level business, government, and military executives. I thought the "B-School" would work its magic and convert me from a self-taught library administrator into a certified modern manager, but I was disappointed.

Early in its history, the Harvard Business School developed the case method of instruction and it has used it almost exclusively in its teaching ever since. The case method can be very effective, but it was overused in the executive development program. In three months, we never read anything but cases, and since the cases were all efficiently reproduced and distributed in convenient packets, we never had the need or the occasion to use the rich resources of the Baker Library. In fact, we seldom had to read from a real book or journal. The classics of management science were rarely mentioned, and with the exception of a few sessions on decision theory and computer simulation, almost no mention was made of any of the new management systems that had been developed and were presumably being used routinely everywhere but in libraries. The Harvard program was useful, but it did not give me the management knowledge and skills that I needed and wanted; so I continued to read about management and to attend management institutes and workshops. (Among the best and most useful are the short programs offered by ARL's Office of Management Studies.) This reading and supplementary training helped me to develop and sharpen my management skills over the years. At the same time, I was gaining confidence and maturity and getting a lot of practical on-the-job experience.

I was also called upon to serve on a number of boards, commissions, and committees; this gave me the opportunity to work closely with and observe a peer group of top managers and executives, not only in libraries, but in universities, business firms, and government offices. I found that most of them, like me, had no special management training or
education and were struggling, each in his or her own unscientific way, to do the management jobs to which they had been appointed. Some were more competent and effective than others, but previous formal management training seemed not to make any significant difference. Indeed, it was hard to tell who had training and who didn't. I noticed that there were few trained management experts in top level management positions. Instead, they were working as specialists in staff positions or as teachers, researchers, or consultants.

I could not see any real difference in what I was doing as a library director and what my peers in other fields were doing. After a while, I began to suspect that the reality of what we managers were experiencing in our day-to-day activities had more validity than the theoretical world of management that was being described in books and articles written by management professors and social scientists.

I was confirmed in that view when I read Henry Mintzberg's *The Nature of Managerial Work*. Mintzberg, a McGill University management professor, had a much different view of management and the way managers worked than the conventional authors: that view checked with my own experience as a library administrator. In order to find out and describe what managers actually did, he conducted a number of studies and also scanned the literature to integrate and synthesize the findings of other studies with his own.

**How do managers manage?**

The studies by Mintzberg and other researchers showed that from street gang leaders to the President of the United States, managers do not spend their time planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling as the French industrialist, Henri Fayol said they did in 1916 and as most writers on management have continued to repeat ever since. They are not like the orchestra leader who directs the component parts of his organization with ease and precision. Instead, they spend their time reacting to crises, seizing special opportunities, attending meetings, negotiating, talking on the telephone, cultivating interpersonal and political relationships, gathering and disseminating information, and fulfilling a variety of ceremonial functions. Mintzberg says:

> I was struck during my study by the fact that the executives I was observing—all very competent by any standard—are fundamentally indistinguishable from their counterparts of a hundred years ago (or a thousand years ago, for that matter). The information they need differs, but they seek it in the same way—by word of mouth. Their decisions concern modern technology, but the procedures they use to make them are the same as the procedures of the 19th Century manager. Even the computer, so important for the specialized work of the organization, has apparently had no influence on the work procedures of general managers. In fact, the manager is in a kind of loop, with increasingly heavy work pressures but no aid forthcoming from management science.

The Mintzberg view is by no means unique. There is a growing number of management scholars who are questioning the conventional view of management and what managers do. In a critical review of *On Management* (Harper, 1976), a book of articles selected from 25 years of the *Harvard Business Review*, Albert Shapero, a management professor at the University of Texas, strikes a similar note:

> The term management conjures up images of control, rationality, systematic: but studies of what managers actually do depict behaviors and situations that are chaotic, unplanned, and charged with improvisation. The Managerial life at every level is reflexive—responding to calls, memos, personnel problems, fire drills budget meetings, and personnel reviews. Occasionally, however, we find at managerial levels individuals who go 24 hours without being interrupted by meetings or phone calls. They are the long-range planners. the people in O.R., E.D.P., financial or market planning, or market research. Management is really for them. The bulk of the articles in On Management are concerned with ideas from the world of the staff functionary.
Are management systems really used?

What about the claims of widespread use of new scientific management systems and techniques? Is it really true that managers in business, government, and other institutions are using them extensively while we library administrators are lagging far behind?

Let's first look at what a few of the management experts say about the use of these systems in general, and then we will look at their use in libraries.

William R. Dill, dean of the Graduate School of Business Administration at New York University, makes this sober assessment:

_For all the progress we have made in developing good approaches to planning, forecasting, budgeting, and control, and for all the enthusiasm we in schools of management have helped to build for these approaches, their use has been fitful and sporadic. even in the most analytically sophisticated and goal-oriented institutions. In corporations that are pointed out as models for what can be accomplished, the outputs of planning, budgeting, and modeling staffs are often quietly ignored by operating people when times are good; these outputs often seem irrelevant in times of sudden challenge or change. Analysis and planning are still far from foolproof ways to anticipate change and potential crises._

Aaron Wildavsky, dean of the Graduate School of Public Policy at the university of California, Berkeley, has written a number of articles in which he argues convincingly, citing evidence and authorities, that the major modern information systems like PERT, MBO, PPBS, Social Indicators, and Zero Based Budgeting have not worked and cannot work. About PERT (Program Evaluation Review Technique), he says that "the few studies that exist suggest that outside of construction, where one activity tends to follow another, PERT is rarely successful."

On MBO (Management by Objectives), he says: "The trouble with MBO is that the attempt to formalize procedures for choosing objectives without considering organizational dynamics leads to the opposite of what was intended—bad management, irrational choice, and ineffective decision-making." "The main product of MBO, as experience in the United States federal government suggests, is, literally, a series of objectives. Aside from the unnecessary paper work, such exercises are self defeating because they become mechanisms for avoiding rather than making choices. Long lists of objectives are useless because rarely do resources remain beyond the first few."

On PPBS, Wildavsky is equally harsh. He says that "Program budgeting does not work anywhere in the world it has been tried," and that "no one knows how to do program budgeting." His assessments of Social Indicators and Zero Based Budgeting are in a similar vein.

These realistic assessments that we are getting from authorities like Mintzberg, Shapero, Dill, Wildavsky, and others should serve to remind us to maintain a healthy skepticism whenever we read about the effectiveness and widespread use of new management systems and techniques. We librarians should guard against the tendency we have to look for panaceas and to accept uncritically the claims and promises made on behalf of each new management theory or system that appears.

Consider the minimal impact on libraries as compared with the initial promise, for example, of PPBS, Operations Research, MBO, and even Participative Management.

To the best of my knowledge, PPBS has not been successfully implemented in a single library and I doubt that it ever will be. Interest in it is rapidly waning.

The practical application of Operations Research in libraries has been extremely limited to date. One of the earliest and best known economic analyses of library decision making was done in the MIT Libraries in 1969. The report of that study came to this sobering conclusion: "Although helpful, an economic analysis of a university (or public) library is insufficient because libraries operate as political systems and thus improving libraries requires political analysis." In an excellent article on library decision making, Jeffrey Raffel, an economist and co-author of the MIT study begins by saying that "in general, the more important the decision, the less beneficial a cost-benefit analysis is to library decision makers," and concludes by saying that "it is time that we all recognized the politics of libraries and acted accordingly."

In a classic paper on Management by Objectives in academic libraries, James Michalko, after a thorough, critical review of the literature, recommends against the use of MBO in libraries on the grounds that it is a limited approach which is costly and difficult to implement and which yields uncertain results.
Participative management is another “new” management technique that has been particularly oversold in the last decade. In fact, it is considered by many librarians to be the perfect management system. Good management has always included consultation and participation, it is just the name. The faddishness, and some of the formal structures that are new. When used properly and honestly, participative management is a useful process at all levels, and not just by top managers on major decisions as is sometimes assumed. It is essential that there be appropriate consultation and participation of interested and competent staff members on important decisions affecting them. But participative management will not bring on the management millenium in libraries.

Participative management is not decision making by committee or by staff plebiscite. Good management requires that when all the facts have been gathered and analyzed and all the advice is in, the appropriate administrator has to make the decision and take responsibility for it. Knowing when and how to seek and take advantage of consultative advice and prior approval of decisions where appropriate is one of the most important managerial skills. Decisions should be made at the lowest competent level. The library’s critical strategy decisions involve a world outside the library and must usually be made by the director and his chief associates. Staff committees can give good advice on such matters, but they simply do not have the information, the knowledge, or the perspective required to make those decisions and they cannot take responsibility for the results.

One extreme form of participative management, the collegial or faculty system of governance, was developed for academic departments; it works badly there and worse or not at all in libraries. Where it appears to work, it is because those involved have tacitly made concessions to traditional hierarchical systems and the demands of the environment while preserving the collegial form. A library is not an academic department, it is a service organization and should be so administered. A librarian by any other name is still a librarian and it is time for mature acceptance of that fact.

Perhaps the reason that participative management has been embraced so enthusiastically and uncritically by librarians in recent years is not because of its management benefits, but because it appears to be the model that best justifies faculty status. It is assumed that because faculty members participate in a collegial academic decision-making process, that model is the appropriate one to use in libraries if librarians are to achieve faculty status. Much of the library-based management literature since 1970 is self-serving and reflects a direct or indirect preoccupation with matters of staff status and benefits frequently hidden behind arguments for participative management. It is time that we recognized this natural bias and took steps to overcome it by giving more attention and weight to the more objective management literature from outside the library field.

Two recent articles on participative management in libraries, one by James Govan and the other by Dennis Dickenson, give encouraging evidence that the library profession is beginning to take a more realistic and balanced view of the advantages and limitations of participative management and collegial governance. Govan reminds us that:

Librarians cannot afford to degrade services nor alienate their users in an effort, however enlightened or well intentioned, to make their jobs more challenging and satisfying. Participation and consultation cost time and money and often, like faculty deliberations, produce rather conservative results. In this connection, it is useful to remember Masiow’s belief that Theory Y is possible only in periods of affluence. It is also healthy to recall Drucker’s statement that service institutions do not operate for the people who work in them.

In his perceptive article, Dickenson tries to provide “an antidote for some of the more extreme and sometimes naive interpretations of participative management that appear from time to time in library literature”.

Peter Drucker summed up an important truth about management when he said in response to an interviewer’s question about the efficacy of new management techniques: “The young people today expect to see business run by theory, knowledge, concepts, and planning. But then they find it is run like the rest of the world—by experience and expediency, by who you know, and by the hydrostatic pressure in your bladder”.

This is not just the way business is run. It is the way libraries are run as well. And it is the way they will continue to be run despite the current rhetoric about the managerial revolution that is being ushered in by the use of new quantitative and psychological management systems and theories.

Why? Because a library operates in a political environment and nearly all the really important decisions that are made at the highest levels have an overriding political component. They are rarely the product of cost benefit analysis or Operations Research where the various factors are weighed and compared and the “best” or most cost-effective course is chosen. These management techniques can be useful sometimes to implement a program or a project in the most effective manner after the political decision to proceed has been made. They can also be useful in providing a rationale to support some essentially political decision that is being proposed or advocated, or to impress higher authorities or constituents with the competence of the managers and the rationality of their decision making process. Management systems, particularly PPBS, ZBB, and PERT are used in government and military bureaucracies largely because they are mandated by law or regulation.

In the library world, as in education, business, and government, few major program decisions are made solely or even largely on the basis of careful studies of needs and costs. Consider, for example, decisions to build a new library building, to open a new departmental or branch library, to achieve excellence in some special subject discipline, or to embark on a major automation program. These program decisions are usually the result of an initiative or vision by an
imaginative and powerful person, perhaps a library director, a dean, a president, a mayor, or other official. They are political, emotional, or even personal decisions—justified, rationalized, and perhaps implemented with the assistance of various kinds of analyses and studies, but seldom derived from them.

It is important that librarians understand how and why these really critical decisions are made so that they will not be disillusioned or discouraged when they discover that the "best", the most efficient, or the least expensive solution frequently loses out to the one that is the most politically expedient or attractive.

The quantitative approach

I think it is important to make a distinction between the claims made on behalf of complex quantitative management systems such as Operations Research and Cost-Benefit Analysis, and the collection and analysis of quantitative data in libraries to assist in rational decision making. I am questioning the validity and usefulness of these complex systems, but I am not questioning the need for and use of quantitative studies for measuring and evaluating library services. Quite the contrary, we need to know more about libraries, their resources, and how they are actually used. We have relied historically upon input data, e.g., the number of books acquired, the number of serials subscribed to, the number of books circulated, the dollars spent, etc. The qualitative characteristics of these data are dubious; we desperately need reliable measures of library effectiveness.

Following the pioneering work by Fremont Rider in 1940 on the growth of research libraries, there has been an increasing number of extremely valuable quantitative studies like those by Fussler, Lancaster, Buckland, and other works of solid quality. The findings of such studies provide the theoretical foundations and practical knowledge that working library managers need to draw on to help them think clearly and creatively about library management and to make sound decisions based on valid data. This is especially true in this time of transition when the conventional wisdom of our profession will not suffice to see us through.

As one of the library managers for whose benefit and use such studies are presumably made, I thank the authors and urge them on to greater productivity and precision. I also urge them to try to keep their studies as simple as possible and to summarize their findings in readable English.

Unfortunately, a good deal of the quantitative research that is done in the library field is unintelligible, irrelevant, or too complicated and theoretical for any practical use in libraries. Much of it is written in the language of higher mathematics which is incomprehensible to most managers. This is particularly true of studies that are made by academics outside the library field such as statisticians, economists, psychologists, Operations Research people, etc. Their goal is not necessarily to do studies that are useful, but to demonstrate their mathematical prowess, to test theories and methodologies, to get published, and to award doctoral degrees to deserving graduate students. They select the library as their laboratory because it is convenient and because they think it is virgin territory ready for easy exploitation. They are more interested in the process than in the results.

The most useful library research is done by librarians or others with a serious long-term interest and involvement in libraries who work with librarians in a spirit of genuine collaboration. They are trying to make an impact. It is the difference between a class assignment and the real thing, between war games and war.

A notable exception to this criticism of academics is the landmark work by William J. Baumol and Matityahu Marcus, Economies of Academic Libraries (American Council on Education, Washington, D.C., 1973). These two economists went to unusual lengths to explain their statistical methods and to summarize their conclusions with refreshing brevity and clarity. As a consequence, their work is widely read and frequently cited.

Management scientists and other quantitatively oriented researchers frequently wonder why the results of quantitative
research studies are not used more by practicing library managers in the decision making process. One reason is that the mathematics and the methodologies required are far too complex and difficult for operating managers to learn and apply in their busy work environments. Few senior library administrators have the kind of staff support needed to successfully carry out complex analyses. Another and equally important reason is that the quantitative approach does not and cannot take into sufficient account the complex of political, organizational, and psychological factors that characterize the real work where people are more potent than numbers or logic.

The quality of many decisions could be significantly improved if we had more and better data, but many of the more important decisions have a relatively small quantitative component. As a library director, I seldom have a critical need for more quantitative data than are available from regularly kept statistics or by having someone make a special and usually simple survey and analysis of the problem. When the data are simply not available or too difficult to assemble, I can usually find a satisfactory way to manage without them. My real problem has nearly always been to correctly assess the political rather than the economic or quantitative factors. It is fairly easy to determine the most cost-effective course of action with or without detailed data. It is much harder to map out and implement a successful strategy for achieving it, to assess how the various persons and groups affected will perceive the manager's intentions, and how they will react to the decision. Someone said that quantification is not synonymous with management. Finding the best or most cost-effective course of action is not the same as getting it accepted. Sometimes the quality of a decision is critical, other times, it is acceptance.

Effective decision making processes in large academic and public libraries involve complex sets of policies, procedures, and problems which require a variety of different kinds of information and approaches. Some decisions will be authoritarian. some will be collegial, some will be by committees, and some will be by combinations of the above. Library directors are not all knowing, nor are the collective judgments of library faculties and committees infallible. Different situations call for different approaches. There are no simple formulas and no easy answers.

The new management systems that I have been discussing in this article divide into two general categories. There are quantitative systems such as Operations Research, PPBS, and ZBB, and psychological or behavioral systems such as Theory Y (and its variants) and MBO. In each system, there are a number of concepts, ideas, tools, and techniques that have validity and can be used to advantage by library managers, but as comprehensive systems they are all far too theoretical, complex, and simplistic to be applied successfully by ordinary managers in the day-to-day work environment. Few managers have the time or the specialized knowledge and skills required to make these systems work, and those that do are probably astute enough to manage as well or better without them.

In the hands of amateurs-and this is most of us-the quantitative systems frequently produce misleading and wrong solutions, while the psychological or behavioral systems can lead to the manipulation and misuse of people. The real danger with both kinds of management systems is that they offer mechanistic formulas for dealing with complex realities and keep us from thinking about and solving our management problems in practical, realistic, and common sense ways.

Despite the many claims to the contrary, management is not yet a science. It is still an art, but is very much an art that can and should be mastered and practiced by librarians.

References
Library organization and library administration are closely related to each other. The distinction between the two is very subtle. Organization comes before administration. Administration is that function of management which, in reality, executes or carries out the objectives for which the institution is planned, established and then organized. Organization ensures that men, materials, jobs, various units and their included activities are properly classified, defined and nicely arranged showing harmony and functional relationships, whilst administrative function ensures that personnel are properly fitted to the jobs; works are performed properly with satisfaction; and that men, materials, finance and working conditions are congenial and satisfactory to yield the

12. Raffel, From Economic to Political Analysis ..., p. 412, 421.


According to Theo Haimann, "Administration means overall determination of policies, setting of major objectives, the identification of general purposes and laying down of broad programmes and projects." It refers to the activities of higher level. It lays down basic principles of the enterprise. According to Newman, "Administration means guidance, leadership & control of the efforts of the groups towards some common goals." The difference between Management and Administration can be summarized under 2 categories.